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ARGOSY

DECEMBER, 1957

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THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

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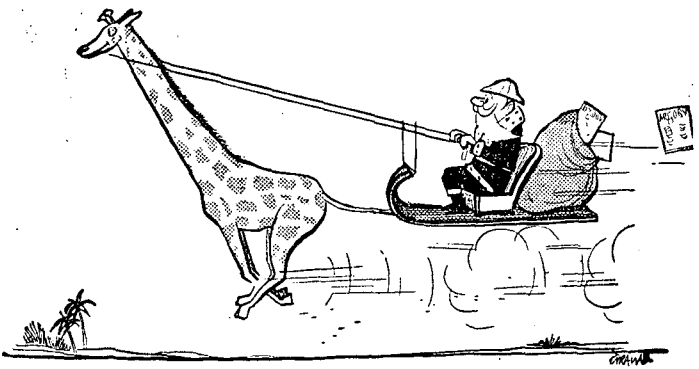

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ARGOSY

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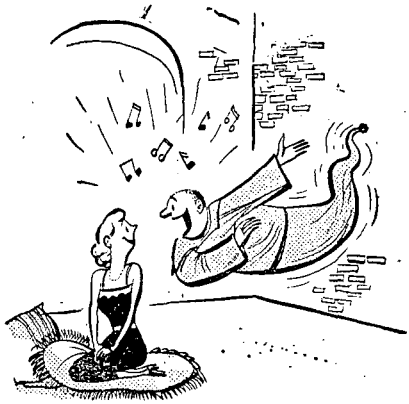

Log Book

WE feel sure that one of these days somebody is going to write a musical about lamas. They are a popular topic for books, just now, and a Tibetan *Oklahoma!* seems too good an opportunity to be missed, with temple bells, and Mount Everest in the background, and a lovely heroine—Miss D-b-r-h K-rr, perhaps?—bewildered, and well she may be, by the goings-on of the lamas.

We bet it will be called *Pistol-packin' Lama.*

In our young days there was a spate of books about Tibet from *Lost Horizon* and *Ayesha* on the one hand to serious topographical works on the other; our favourite character was that lama who took such a fancy to Madame David-Neel that he couldn't help sailing after her through the air. When they weren't sailing through the air the lamas sat in frozen streams with saucers of melted butter on their heads. Nowadays—or so we are delighted to read in the columns of an august contemporary daily—they project themselves through tiny holes in brick walls and engage in cross-country obstacle races ending at Lhasa. Plenty of material for a musical there.

First there will be the scene in which the heroine, a singer who has lost her voice and is all mixed-up, is advised by the wise old lama (Mr. R-b-rt M-tch-m):

There's a hole in your aura, dear Laura, dear Laura,
So saddle your blues to a pack on the back of a yak,
And go search for some high-mountain flora.
Chorus of Lamas: Yak-i-iddy-i-ay, etc.

So up she goes to an unclimbed peak where she meets Mr. M-tch-m again in a previous incarnation and very much younger.

She is still suffering from tensions and has a nightmare on the high peaks—a full-scale fantasy ballet with sherpas, lamas, and

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abominable snowmen in giddy array on the slopes of Aling Kangri. Mr. M-tch-m reassures her:

Dig that abominable snowman, gal
He's no great looker, but he's a pal—

and her tensions are resolved. Hero declares his love, and enters in the national obstacle race to prove himself worthy. He wins.

Competition appears in the form of a temple girl:

Oh my!
that Dalai Dalila!
Watching her strolling
Gets the mocking birds rocking
and rolling
Oh my!
the delights of Dalai!

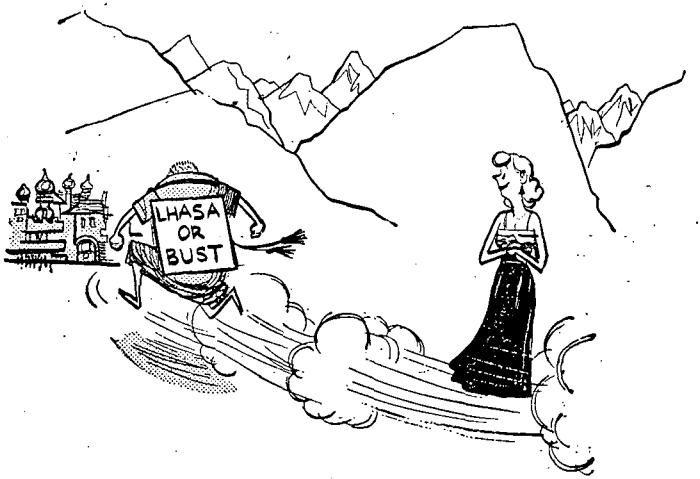
However the hero soon notices that her aura is a dirty green as opposed to Miss K-rr's seraphic blue, and she is unveiled and discovered to be a spy.

Action closes on a sunset peak with the famous duet (later to be used by police as a test for inebriated motorists):

She got me at Shigatse, my sugar pie
Humming a Himalayan lullaby.

Chorus of lamas in black silk pyjamas, and the heroine's voice in full fettle again by this time.

Our readers are advised to keep away from *Pistol-packin' Lama* when it hits the town; they will receive a more rational evening's entertainment by staying at home with the new issue of Argosy. There is no extra charge for this advice.



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Mignon G. Eberhart was driven to writing by lack of reading matter; her husband is a civil engineer and she has spent many months in the wilds waiting for a bridge to be built or a river turned off its course. She writes mystery novels because it's fun, says she never touches a revolver and can't stand the sight of blood or going downstairs in the dark, but she loves fictional staircases—"No matter how or where I begin a story, pretty soon a stairway comes creeping into it." She lives in Connecticut in a reputedly haunted house.

William E. Barrett has been a journalist all his life, from cub reporter on the Denver Times to book-reviewing on the Boston Transcript. He lives in Denver, and is the author of six novels—*The Left Hand of God* and *The Shadows of the Images* have been bestsellers. His hobby is books, which means that he also collects book-cases, book-ends and spare rooms.

Tip on a Dead Jockey, **Irwin Shaw**'s tensely exciting new story of adventure in a Paris setting, forms the titlepiece of his latest collection of stories. Shaw began his literary career writing for radio; his play *Bury the Dead* was put on in New York when he was only twenty-three.

JOHN SILVER

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MURDERER IN THE DARK

At the whisper of the door opening my flesh crawled

BY MIGNON G. EBERHART

ONE of the three people seated with me round the dinner table of the luxurious farmhouse was not only a forger but a murderer. This I knew. And I had the picture of the criminal in my pocket at that moment. The bizarre thing was that I was quite unable to tell even then which of the three was guilty.

It was a letter that started the events of that evening on their strange and indeed frightening course. My name is James Wickwyre; I am a senior vice-president of the bank within whose walls I have spent most of my life. The letter, urgent and airmail, was from my lifetime friend and client, Horace Wells, posted from Rome where he was serving on a diplomatic mission.

My dear Jim—You may have seen in the papers that my nephew, Lassiter Wells, was found dead last night in his room at the farm. He had been shot, and the gun was one from my own gun cabinet in the library. They say his fingerprints were on it. Faked, of course. But the police have called this suicide. I know it is murder.

Let me give you all the facts. Lassiter acted as my secretary, and yesterday I received a long cable from him, saying he had discovered a forged cheque on my account. The cheque, torn out of my farm cheque-book, was made out to Lassiter for $2,000 and was endorsed by a forgery of his signature. My signature was similarly forged on the face. It was cashed at your bank where Lassiter isn't known.

Lassiter's cable informed me that his wallet containing club-membership cards and that sort of thing had been missing for a day or two, and presumably this was used for identification at the bank. He suspected who had taken it, and this gave him the identity of the culprit, whose name he said he wanted to withhold from me till he had finished an investigation. He was shot that night, only a few hours after he sent the cable.

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There were just three people in the house at the time of the murder who could have had access to the cheque-book, since the farm and domestic staffs do not live in. These three are John Crandel, my farm manager, Lisa Benly, his assistant, and Chloe Henderson, a young widow who is my guest. Any one of them could have had access to the cheque-book. Jim, will you go to the farm and clear this up for me? I'll cable Crandel to expect you, saying that I have asked you to carry out an appraisal of the farm. I'd be enormously grateful to you . . .

I replied by cable—and rather too confidently: IDENTIFICATION SIMPLE AS HAVE PHOTOGRAPH OF FORGER. SYMPATHY. WICKWYRE. I then went to Wells's Pennsylvania farm.

Horace Wells having paved my way, no one questioned my arrival—no one, that is, except an enormous liver-coloured dog, who appeared as I walked up the lane from the village taxi. He looked rather like the Hound of the Baskervilles and uttered a deep growl that stopped me in my tracks. However, I like dogs and can honestly say that they like me, so I put out my hand, palm downward in the etiquette right-thinking dogs expect. He sniffed at my hand, examined my shoes and my bag, apparently decided in my favour, and wagged his tail.

I scratched his ears, the tail wagged faster, then there was a sound and the dog loped swiftly away as the front door opened.

A thin, nondescript sort of man came to meet me. "Mr. James Wickwyre? We've been expecting you. I'm John Crandel. You're just in time for dinner."

It was then that my reliance upon the photograph suffered its first shock. And when he led me into the house and introduced me to Mrs. Henderson and to Lisa Benly, my heart sank. I realized at once that my confidence had been decidedly premature. The face in the photograph had to be the face of one of the three—and I couldn't tell which one.

Someone gave me a cocktail and we went in to dinner. I munched roast pheasant, listened to the talk around the table—which did not so much as mention Lassiter Wells, dead only three days—and fended off a red setter who snatched at a biscuit in my hand. The talk was mainly of dogs and horses of which there seemed to be an inordinate supply, not only on the farm but in the dining-room.

Horses, painted in oils, with brass name-plates and moody expressions stared at me from the walls. Dogs panted, scratched, and thumped round our feet, although my liver-coloured friend was not among them.

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The stout butler who served us was the only person present who could not be the murderer—simply because he was so fat.

I finished my pheasant. A large Siamese cat appeared in the door of the library and achieved the table-top, a pheasant bone from my plate, and the library again with what appeared to be one leap. The dogs streamed after him. Nobody so much as raised an eyebrow; baffled yells came presently from the library suggesting that the cat had eluded his pursuers; and dessert was placed on the table.

Chloe Henderson suggested bridge and we adjourned to the library. A gun cabinet—*the* gun cabinet—was built into the wall across the room. Mrs. Henderson poured coffee and led the way to the bridge table.

"I live next door," she told me. "It's so kind of Horace to invite me to stay here while my house is being redecorated."

John Crandel gave her a glowering look. "You're a spendthrift, Chloe. You'd have done better to put that money in a new roof for your cattle barn."

She shrugged prettily. "I was thankful that I was here when the tragedy occurred. Poor Horace. I sent him a cable at once."

I noticed John glowering again, and then decided to risk a direct question.

"You were referring to Lassiter Wells's suicide? Horace wrote to me about it. Just how did it happen?"

Chloe Henderson said, "It was dreadful. None of us had any idea he was contemplating such a thing. We were asleep and there was just the sound of the gun. Such a shock! By the time we were thoroughly awake and had the lights turned on, Lassiter still hadn't appeared, so we went to his room. By that time he was—was dead. He must have died at once; I told Horace that."

I could think of nothing to say in response to this information. As a matter of fact, I was still trying and failing to identify one of the three faces round the bridge table as the face on the photograph in my pocket.

Its existence was not due to chance. We had had some petty forgeries at the bank. Now I need not say that there is a certain prejudice in banking circles against forgery. My bank had a sound reason for taking action regarding it for we protect our depositors' accounts to the extent of making good any fraudulent cheques that have been mistakenly cashed.

So the forgeries had to be stopped and one of the measures we took was the installation of cameras at the tellers' windows, and a workable plan not only for quietly taking the picture of any face presenting itself at the window, but for filing the resultant photograph and the requisite data concerning it.

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The experiment had been in operation at the time of the Wells forgery; a photograph of the person who had posed as Lassiter Wells and boldly presented the forged cheque had consequently been available to me.

But the fact was—and I was obliged to accept it—the face in the photograph could have been almost anybody's face. Perhaps the teller had not chosen an auspicious moment for pressing the lever of the camera: the head was bent and the face shadowed by a hat pulled low over the eyes. But it was one of those faces that seem to fade to complete anonymity before a camera—and I had perceived its anonymity only when the problem of specific identification presented itself. I was not even sure now whether it was the face of a man or a woman. The person pictured was wearing a man's suit, but women have on occasion successfully assumed men's clothing. The face was a slender blob, the hair cut short. That was all.

And the three people round the table might each have been in a state of disguise so far as any likeness or unlikeness to the photograph was concerned. John Crandel was totally unremarkable; his was the kind of face one might see a hundred times a day and fail to note. Chloe Henderson, slender and attractive, was so heavily made up with eyebrow pencil, lipstick, and so on that her face was like a painted mask.

And Lisa Benly—slender, too—was masked in another way for she wore no make-up at all, which left her face a bare and slightly shining oval, as unremarkable as John Crandel's face. Mrs. Henderson's hair was black and curly; Lisa Benly's was straight and brown. But both women wore their hair cut very short. Inwardly I cursed the current feminine fashion—and wished that Horace Wells had called on more expert assistance than mine.

Eventually the butler waddled in with a tray of iced water and decanters and departed for the night. Chloe Henderson yawned and said, " One more rubber "—and everyone and everything in the room froze.

Lisa Benly suddenly and for no apparent reason turned perfectly and coldly white. A dog near me did not so much as lift his head but his hackles rose. John Crandel gripped his cards so hard that they slowly crumpled. The cat stood soundlessly upright, arched his back and his tail, and his blue eyes turned ruby-red. It was like a horrifying spell put on the room, yet there wasn't a sound.

Then Chloe Henderson looked up, took in the situation with one swift glance, and said, " Good gracious! It's Happy."

She turned to look over her shoulder and there in the doorway the Hound of the Baskervilles, my liver-coloured friend, surveyed

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us. It is true that his silent regard had something rather ominous about it, but as his eyes met mine his tail gave a tentative wag. Naturally I started to rise, intending to meet any friendly overture halfway, but Crandel seized my arm in a steely grip that clamped me to my seat. Chloe Henderson sprang up, advanced upon the animal, grasped his collar, and led him out of the room and upstairs.

Nobody moved until a door somewhere above closed. Lisa Benly then moistened her white lips and John Crandel laughed shakily. " We've got to do something about that dog. He's a killer. We ought to have let him die. He's not worth the vet's bill. He was Lassiter's dog, with him every instant. Only Lass could manage him. Lass and Chloe."

" That dog is no killer," I said indignantly, upon which Crandel and Lisa Benly both gave me a look of utter disbelief.

Chloe Henderson returned. " I put him in Lass's room," she said. " I'll let him out later when you've all gone to bed."

Lisa Benly said she'd had enough of cards for the evening. Then, under the pretence of getting out a handkerchief, I contrived to withdraw the photograph at the same time and drop it on the table.

I am not a brave man, neither am I an impulsive one. I dare say I acted merely on the principle of stirring up muddy waters to see what would happen. And the trouble was that, just then, nothing happened.

All three, quite naturally, glanced at the photograph; I was sure of that. But Chloe Henderson merely put her cards together; John Crandel said he had to be at the stables early in the morning; Lisa Benly said good night and disappeared.

I restored the photograph to my pocket. The dogs surged up from various spots round the room and the cat leapt ahead of us and up the stairs.

It was a pleasant guest room to which Mrs. Henderson showed me, although full of chintz and photographs of horses and dogs.

" I'm sorry Horace isn't here to welcome you," she said. " Horace and I—well, we're thinking of marriage, you know."

This explained not only her hostesslike manner, but some of Horace's anxiety. It did not, however, clear her of murder. I could not avoid the swift reflection that the removal of Lassiter Wells disposed at the same time of a contending heir, so to speak, to Horace's fortune. Also, Crandel had called her a spendthrift, and something—perhaps the banker's curiously developed sense of money and people—suggested to me that it was an accurate statement.

She might have forged a cheque, finding herself in need of

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cash, and when Lassiter accused her, she could have taken a desperate way out by killing him. Without its mask of make-up, her face could have been that on the bank's photograph. But then, it could equally well have been Lisa Benly's or John Crandel's.

After offering her my felicitations, I said, " I've never met Crandel before. Has he worked for Horace for a long time? "

" Five years," she replied. " Horace pays him well, you know. Too well, I think. John Crandel is only waiting until he can save enough money to buy a farm of his own. The minute he does that he'll leave Horace like a shot."

" I expect Miss Benly could carry on then."

Mrs. Henderson's eyes snapped. " Lisa," she said, " would do anything for money! I've strongly advised Horace not to rely on her. Good night, Mr. Wickwyre."

She swept away, first ejecting a red setter and a spaniel who had drifted into the room, and remarking that she always shut the dogs in the kitchen before she released Happy who, I took it, prowled the house at night.

I bolted the door only to discover that the Siamese cat had settled down among some framed pictures on top of a bookcase. He refused to be dislodged, eying me with shining blue slits of eyes.

So each of them, if I accepted unsolicited testimony, had a motive for forgery and murder. Chloe, the spendthrift. Lisa who would do anything for money. John Crandel who was only marking time until he could purchase his own place. I got out the photograph again, but the face remained a pale and anonymous smudge: I returned it impatiently to my pocket.

It was the cat who initiated a line of exploration I ought to have taken in the beginning, but then I am no expert. Either from innate devilry or because he wished to make himself more comfortable on the crowded bookcase, he put out a sepia-coloured paw, gave a silver-framed picture a deliberate push, and then stretched his neck to follow its fall to the floor with a kind of smug interest.

I picked up the picture. It was a group photograph, five people in an admiring circle round a horse. Horace Wells, huge and fleshy, was smiling. A younger man, also big and fleshy, was obviously Lassiter Wells for he strongly resembled his uncle; clearly, if I had had any doubts before, I knew now his was not the face of the forger. John Crandel stood nearby; before the camera his thin face took on harsh and predatory lines. Lisa Benly, in blue jeans and white shirt, held the bridle; her face, bare of make-up, was a glistening oval. Chloe Henderson looked like a film star in smart riding-clothes and a graceful pose.

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The horse looked bored. And I knew who had forged the cheque and murdered Lassiter.

A creature padded along the hall and sniffed under my door in such a ravening manner that I was certain it was Happy. After a time he padded away again, and suddenly I thought: Lassiter's dog, who never left Lassiter, and would have permitted only Chloe Henderson to enter Lassiter's room—where he was killed.

I thought for some time. Eventually a scrap of conversation from earlier in the evening floated into my mind and, if it meant what I thought, it might lead to something. I don't believe in hunches, yet perhaps they are in fact the sum total of observation and instinct. In any event I went downstairs.

I made no attempt to move quietly; I was reasonably sure that somewhere there was a pair of wakeful and listening ears, someone warned by my possession of the photograph, and I wished them to record my activities.

Happy, of course, was on the prowl, but as I could not really accept the theory that he was a lurking fiend in canine shape, I only hoped that he would not rouse the house by barking. Halfway along the hall a cold nose suddenly thrust itself against my hand. It gave me rather a start but after a moment it withdrew silently into the darkness, and I found my way into the library.

I left the door a little ajar to permit my voice to be overheard, and groped my way to the telephone. Here, assisted by the operator who knew and rang the number I desired, I made a local call. The reply to my question was what I had thought it might be.

I waited for a moment, listening. After a time I was sure that I heard a faint sound from the hall. I had to take some action, and as I could think of nothing else, I put in a transatlantic call to Horace Wells in his hotel in Rome—keeping the receiver rest firmly depressed. And all the time I listened.

When there was the whisper of the door opening I admit that my flesh crawled. I shouted into the phone, as somehow one does shout over the transatlantic phone, "Horace! I'm at the farm." I paused to lend verisimilitude to my pretended conversation; then I replied to a question that hadn't been asked. "Yes, Lassiter was murdered. Undoubtedly. And I know who did it. I've got evidence—"

Here I paused again, thinking that Horace would have said something at this point—and thus heard a small but unmistakable click from across the room. It was the door of the gun cabinet, whose dangerous proximity to the telephone and to me I had forgotten.

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I am not sure what I did then, but I believe I acted very quickly for all at once I was crouching behind the sofa with the voice of an aroused telephone operator sounding metallically from the table where I had dropped the receiver. Other than that there was a total and, I might say, extremely unnerving silence. I don't know how long it was before I sensed that some new element had added itself to the room.

There was still no sound; instinct alone announced its presence to me. It identified itself, however, by a sudden and terrifying growl. A chair went over with a thud. Revolver shots crashed through the darkness.

They stopped; their echoes died away. And in the silence arose a shrill and indescribably eerie scream.

After a startled moment I realized the scream was that of the telephone operator. I crept towards the table, groped upwards, found a lamp, and turned on the light.

Lisa Benly stood with a gun in her hand, backed into a corner. The dog made a dive at her throat just as I reached him and got both hands on his collar. I pulled back as hard as I could. Lisa screamed, " Hold him," and dropped the gun.

I shouted as loudly as I could, " Down, Happy! Down! " I don't know why I expected him to obey, nor indeed why he obeyed, but he did drop down at my feet.

Lisa Benly stared at me and put her hands over her face as Chloe Henderson and Crandel rushed into the room.

Within a few minutes the police arrived, summoned by the alarmed telephone operator. There was considerable conversation, in which I found it rather difficult to join owing to the dog, who seemed agreeably moved by the rapport between us and made strenuous gestures of friendship.

I fended off his enormous paws as best I could and told the police that I believed that Lisa Benly had forged the cheque; that Lassiter Wells had had reason, probably we would never know exactly what reason, to suspect that she had used cards belonging to him for purposes of identification; that he had accused her, and that she had shot him.

" I don't know what she has done with the money, but I suggest you may find it in a banking account under another name. Also," I got the bank's photograph from my pocket, " I suggest that you give this photograph and a framed picture in the guest room to experts for comparison."

The policemen looked as blank as the face in the photograph, so I was obliged to explain. " A camera does odd things to faces. Some faces seem to blank out and obscure; others leap into a

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great clarity of feature in a photograph—those of film stars, for instance. Mrs. Henderson's face, in the picture upstairs, is what is called photogenic in the extreme; her picture, indeed, is far more beautiful than she is in fact."

Mrs. Henderson gave a pained sort of murmur. I continued. "John Crandel's face is photogenic, too—although in a different way, as his features in a picture become decidedly ugly—I should say, rugged." John Crandel, surprisingly, seemed pleased.

"On the other hand," I said, "there are faces that are remarkably unphotogenic. They seem to blank out almost unrecognizably before a camera. You have doubtless heard people say that no two pictures of them are alike and that none of their pictures resembles them.

"Miss Benly is one of those people; she is, in short, non-photogenic—like the face in this photograph. As it is the photograph of one of these three people and Crandel and Mrs. Henderson are eliminated, it is obviously the photograph of Lisa Benly."

It was not, however, so obvious to the police, even after I explained the photograph. They eyed me sceptically.

"She may have intended me as a target," I said, "for she overheard what she took to be a conversation that was very dangerous to her. But in fact she shot at the dog. He is supposed to be a killer."

Here, to my intense annoyance, Happy turned over on his back, and rolled his eyes fondly at me. The policeman's look of scepticism deepened. Clearly, more convincing evidence was required so I gave it to them.

"John Crandel is afraid of the dog. But Lisa Benly is terrified. The dog was devoted to Lassiter. She would not have dared enter Lassiter's room at night, had the dog been present.

"This evening Crandel said something about the vet's bill for the dog; I telephoned the vet a short time ago. He said that the dog was in his care the night Lassiter was shot; he said the dog had been poisoned. I suggest that she poisoned him, to get him out of the way—and I rather think that you'll find that she procured poison at some chemist in the vicinity and gave a farm need as her reason for buying it."

Here John Crandel made his only, but pertinent, remark. "Arsenic. Said she got it for rats. Bought it the afternoon before Lass was shot."

"Now *that*," said one of the policemen, "is more like *evidence*." But he stretched out his hand for the photograph. The gesture affected Happy adversely. I was obliged to drag him upstairs with me, in order to procure the framed group picture for the police. And here I had rather a shock.

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I merely glanced in the mirror. The face in the mirror, my own face, was blanked out and nullified by the bright overhead light. It was completely anonymous.

While I have always known that mine is an undistinguished sort of face, I cannot say that it was gratifying to discover that in a picture, it too could be anybody's face.

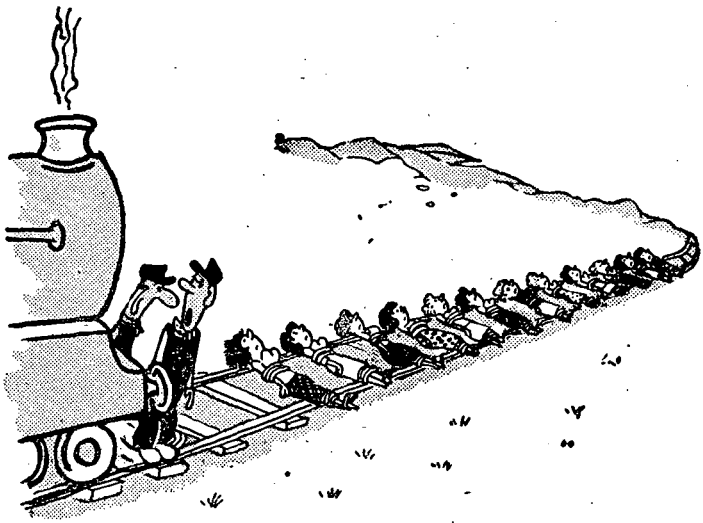
I had another shock a few days after Horace Wells's return: this was an enormous crate, delivered at the bank, with a card attached outside and hair-raising howls emerging from inside. Before I could stop him, the deliveryman opened the crate, gave a wild shout, and made for the door, pursued hotly by a large and familiar liver-coloured form. Bank messengers came running; customers took to the counter-tops.

The note was from Horace Wells and began:

My Dear Jim—Happy is pining; Chloe says for you. Well, dogs are like that. He requires only about ten miles' exercise a day and prefers steak, say five pounds to a meal . . .

I read no further, but returned Happy to the crate.

I should say, I attempted to return Happy to the crate. However, he is not incapable of compromise and has settled for a run round the park and, as I am only a banker, no steaks—although his diet is supplemented by such rugs, table legs, and shoes as he fancies.



"It looks like the work of a fiend!"

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ACCOUNT CLOSED

The night wind on the water can be treacherous

BY JOHN SALT

AT sundown by long custom Mrs. Cora Floraline, the proprietress, chose a Havana cigar and seated herself at a small table on the wooden balcony of her establishment, the Baltimore Tavern and Seaman's Rest.

Below her the short white dresses of the blanchisseuses fluttered mothlike in the dark as they loitered on their way to a revival meeting held nightly on the point by the Careenage. Already the reverberating thump of the big drum and the scraping shuffle of restless feet betokened the gathering of a crowd and the washer girls quickened their pace, anxious to be there when the singing began.

There is no evening as such in Barbados, no gradual shading of twilight into darkness; punctually and spectacularly in the late afternoon the sun, like an incandescent boulder, hurls itself into the sea and night has arrived. It is then that the breeze blows cool on the hot white stones, blending the harbour reek of sea and salt-soaked cordage with the richer scent of vat molasses, the subtle tang of new rum. Then, too, the raking masts of the island schooners weave a dance among the stars and the mailed claws of the land-crabs clash as they scuffle in the dockside alleys.

For this is the magic time when Bridgetown comes to life and Africa tingles in the blood with the rataplan of sticks on steel and the off-beat lilt of a calypso from a lighted window in a street that is forbidden. It was quite the best time, too, for Mrs. Floraline who began her working day when the sun was safely on the sea bed. As darkness fell she would put on her stiff black bombazine, her heavy jet necklace, and the pendent earrings that matched; then, taking her account book very firmly under one arm, make her slow and majestic way to the little table on the balcony.

Choosing her moment, Estelle, the tall and heavily buttressed one who seldom smiled, would serve her with iced beer in a tall glass, while Elaine, the elfin one who smiled all the time, hovered nearby with the cigar box held open. Sometimes Estelle, as

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major-domo, would be required to take pencil and paper and note down fresh orders for food and drink; at other times Bess, the taxi-driver and head smuggler, would be summoned, cap in hand, to give his account of troubles on the previous night or to say what small item of interesting contraband might be expected on the next ship into Carlisle Bay.

But for the most part Cora would sit alone, savouring her magic hour until the band arrived and business began, glancing idly but always acutely at the scene below, or turning her gaze inward on the great room with its bare scrubbed boards and table-lined walls.

Mrs. Floraline was a business woman with her hand in a great many ventures; she knew Barbados, its people big and small, and her wealth these days was measured in barrels and in bales, in bonds and in Trinidad dollar bills. She was an old woman, too, and by all accounts a happy one, until perhaps a week ago when doubt first laid a cold hand on her heart. Now she waited for Kartar Singh, and fingered a tiny black japanned pin-box that lay before her on the table beside her beer glass.

Cora had started her various businesses down by the harbour among the ships that brought her wealth. Rising prosperity had not encouraged her to move into a better part of town nor to alter her way of life. She had left that to Kartar Singh, the beardless Sikh from Trinidad who had joined her twenty years back and now had a big shop on Broad Street, handling her retail trade together with certain other small items without benefit of customs examination. That part of the business was small enough these days but Cora had kept it going for the sake of old friends and it was only now that she questioned the wisdom of her action.

A single bulb burnt over the bar where Estelle washed and prepared glasses, but the rest of the room was filled with shadows, and Cora's heavy face was lit only by the diffused yellow radiance of a distant street lamp. She gave no greeting when Singh glided silently across the room and seated himself before her. Estelle brought him a fruit drink, and for a moment the old woman and the Indian sat in silence, facing each other.

Cora looked hard at her partner's smooth dark face; it told her nothing. He had not aged in twenty years and she knew no more about him now than she had ever done. He was a good business man, which was all she had ever needed to know. But now that was not enough.

She took a long pull at her beer and made her first inquiry. "You doing good, man?"

Singh spread his hands deprecatingly and inclined his head. Mrs. Floraline's gaze wandered off around the room, taking in

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the bad painting of a skysail yarder making the Windward Passage with a following gale; the fading colour-print of the Prince of Wales that was; settled at last on a dusty potted palm on the battered upright piano. She asked her second question.

"Who is shipping snow into 'Bados, Kartar Singh?"

The Indian hissed politely, indicating puzzlement. "I am not knowing this word snow, Mis' Cora."

The old lady hit the table a sudden thump and looked full at her partner. "No time to play," she said. "Somebody peddling dope in the island. Police Chief Miller knows, he's been to see me. What do you know? It must be something."

Singh made the same outward motion with his hands as before. "It is written somewhere among your people that charity begins at home," he remarked gravely.

"Ain't written anywhere that I know of," Cora grumbled, "then I got no book-learning and it may be so. Take a look at that, anyway."

She flipped up the lid of the little japanned box and let the yellow light of the street lamp fall upon white powder. Singh put a long forefinger into the contents, then raised it delicately to his mouth. He touched the powder gently with his tongue then blew upon the finger. Some grains flew off and fell to the table, leaving a residue of white dust still adhering to the fingertip.

"The drug is not pure," he said at last.

Cora nodded sourly. "It's the rough stuff, all right. Somebody's trying to do this on the cheap, the worst kind of way."

"Where did you get it?" Singh's eyes were like slits, his mouth a straight white line.

"Like charity—at home. We found it in a false bottom under a heap of other stuff with that consignment of watch parts. You remember—the lot I sent you."

"What made you look?"

"I've been hearing bad tales. Look, Kartar Singh, I don't deal in snow and I don't want my people dealing in it. Stands to reason whoever put it along with my stuff must have somebody else to place it for him this side."

"You looking at me, Mis' Cora?"

"Not special. I just thought we'd better have a talk."

The Indian watched her warily. "These tales you have been hearing. Were some of them about a car that went over Crane Point, two or three weeks back?"

"Seems like I did hear that," Cora agreed cautiously.

"Was that all you heard?"

"Just what the papers said, that there were two high school

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kids in it, hurt pretty bad, a boy and a girl. The other tale I heard was that the driver had been at this stuff," she indicated the little black box.

"The girl was my niece," said Kartar Singh. "Does that answer your questions?"

Cora did not reply and the Sikh went on. "Sita is a good girl. The doctors tell me that she will recover in time. This snow of which you speak was shown to her at a party, we do not know by whom. Her friend had been taking some over a period but probably not enough to do lasting damage. They are both very lucky, though, to be alive after such a crash. The car plunged thirty feet to the beach."

Cora Floraline took the cigar from her mouth and scattered ash over the balcony rail. She seemed relieved.

"Kartar Singh, what would you do if you found somebody peddling cocaine to your own children?"

The Sikh gave a terrible smile. "Mine is a warrior caste. I should kill," he said.

The old lady reverted to her normal briskness of manner. "I think you are in business," she said. "But first of all, we are both in trouble. Police Chief Miller doesn't know as much about this as he'd like me to think, but he's a smart man and he's been round on my doorstep already. He turned a blind eye in the past to many things 'cause they don't do him no harm and we are old friends. But he's going to come down like a ton of old bricks if he thinks I'm peddling narcotics from Stateside. An odd bottle here, a bunch of watch parts there don't pay nobody no mind, but snow is different and I got to stop it.

"Miller wants a straight answer in twenty-four hours, else he'll be around looking with a warrant."

They both fell silent for a moment, pondering the impatience of Police Chief Miller. Then the Indian put his slender fingers together and, leaning forward, gazed at Mrs. Floraline over the tips of them. "You have a plan?"

Cora took her time about replying and then emphasized her points as she made them by tapping on the table-top with her empty beer glass. "Whoever shipped that last load must know by now that it never got past me. So they'll soon come looking to find out why. And we'll be waiting."

"We?" Singh queried delicately.

"That's what I said," the old lady told him fiercely. "You're just as deep in this as I am and you've got a family to think about which is more than I have."

"You have the business," he reminded her.

Cora's eyes flickered again around the shadowy room. "I've

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had enough," she said wearily. " I'm getting old and I want to clear this up and retire with a clear mind. Do you blame me? "

" I can never blame you, Mis' Cora. Whether I believe that you will retire is another matter. Tell me about the plan."

Estelle was moving about the room, switching on the lights. Cora called to her, " Send Bess in. It's his idea really," she told Singh. " He'll tell you all about it."

" Did Bess find this stuff? " he gestured towards the box.

Cora shook her head. " I told him to look," she said. " He didn't think there would be anything there. I've never seen a man more surprised." A fond look came into her eyes whenever she spoke of Bess.

Singh knew that Cora was greatly attached to the boy. Strictly speaking, there had never been a Mr. Floraline. Cora had taken the name from an old four-masted barque out of St. John's, Newfoundland, in which she had once had an interest, and had added the married title for the sake of the dignity that it gave to her new name. So there was no husband, and, as far as Singh knew, no children, but Cora had always regarded Bess as a son and the young man had served her with a loyalty and affection not always found in even the best-regulated families.

Singh did not altogether approve of the relationship; he was not even sure that he liked Bess. But he had to admit that he was efficient and discreet, if a trifle impulsive, and he knew also that Cora held him in check with the rough side of her tongue as occasion demanded. While he turned these thoughts in his mind, the chauffeur appeared at the table, cap in hand, his whole demeanour one of affectionate deference towards his patron.

Bess was very dark and tall, and thin as a rail, the face thin too and finely drawn, with its flesh scraped close to the bone. He was highly intelligent and that showed at once in his light, inquisitive eyes and in the precise, well-articulated movements of his limbs. Singh could not like him but he appreciated the force of his personality and knew that Bess was a good man to have on the right side in an emergency.

" You told Mr. Singh the story, Mis' Cora? " The voice was soft and oddly without inflection.

Mrs. Floraline nodded, a little impatiently. " He don't know a whole lot more than we do but at least he's not in the racket himself. Better say your piece."

Bess nodded, glanced once behind him at the bar where three merchant seamen had clustered to barrack Estelle, then drew up a chair, and straddled across it, his arms folded along the back. He explained what Singh already knew, that when contraband was to be brought ashore it was ferried in a small boat well after

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midnight from ships lying at anchor half a mile out in Carlisle Bay and landed at the jetty steps of the Baltimore Tavern whose outbuildings ran down to the water's edge. He admitted that somebody in Cora's organization must of necessity know when narcotics were due to be unloaded, but he had been unable so far to discover who it was.

Since the last consignment had been discovered and impounded it seemed possible that the sender might come ashore himself the next time to investigate. A freighter had anchored that morning in the Bay and he felt sure, as did Cora, that the man they wanted might be on board.

Singh looked dubious. "How will you know him?" he asked.

Bess smiled with a bright confidence. "We shan't, but there's one or two things'll help us. Nobody's been away from here all day, I've seen to that. There's no shore leave for the freighter crew, and the ship's due to sail on the early-morning tide. So if the man on board wants to make a contact he's got to come to the Baltimore and do it well after dark, taking a chance that the boy or girl he's after will be awake and waiting for him. He's got to make his bid between twelve and two at the latest, and be quick about it. I'm going to be waiting between the freighter and the jetty in a small boat. Mis' Floraline says you might like to come and sit it out with me."

"Like is too strong a word," Singh told him shortly. "I'll be on the jetty at midnight, if that won't be too late."

Bess nodded, looked inquiringly at Mrs. Floraline for his dismissal, and strode away. Singh and Cora watched him descend the back stairs to the street, his tall figure casting long broken shadows before him.

"He a good boy," Cora said fondly.

Singh did not answer. He got up and, leaning his elbows on the balcony rail, looked at the night sky. It was clear overhead so far, and a broad moon bathed Bridgetown. From the bridge by the Careenage came the sound of the big drum, the chanting of many voices, and the stamping of feet. The service was in full swing.

Mrs. Floraline cocked an ear to the noise. "They'll be in here thirsty soon," she said dourly. "Where are you going between now and midnight, Kartar Singh?"

He stood a moment longer, looking down at her with the same quiet, rather sad smile. "I am going home to look at my accounts, then I am going to have a good look at my wife and children. After that I am going to do something I have put off for too long."

"What might that be?"

"Make my will, Mis' Cora."

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" You getting morbid, Kartar Singh? "

" Not morbid, Mis' Cora. Just a bit careful. They tell me the night wind on the water can be treacherous for men of my age."

" For men of any age. But you'll have Bess to look after you."

" That's true, but I'd like to say just one thing more—something I think you really will find written somewhere."

" What is it? "

" Love is blind, Mis' Cora."

" I'll look it up," Mrs. Floraline told him absently, and resumed her musings at the table as the Sikh left her.

It was not until much later in the evening when the room was alive with noise and laughter, with the thumping of feet to a calypso piano and guitar, that the import of Singh's parting words came home to Mrs. Floraline. Even then you could not have told from her broad, impassive face that her heart was torn by grief, or that she knew fear now as she had not known it since, as a young girl, long ago, she had watched the Shango magicians dance in the forests of Martinique.

Kartar Singh always wore a long black jacket with tight white trousers; he did not change his dress for the appointment with Bess on the Baltimore jetty. The windows above were dark and silent as he walked beneath the timbered entrance to the yard; but one light burnt at the back of the house and he knew that Cora, too, was keeping vigil.

He found Bess seated on a bollard at the end of the jetty; the boy's cigarette described a long glowing arc through the darkness and hissed into the water as Singh approached. Bess led the way down a crazy rotting ladder and stood aside on a lower ledge to let Singh enter the boat. The Indian settled himself in the prow and Bess crouched on the half-deck, working a single oar over the stern. The full moon entered a wrack of cloud as the small boat moved slowly out across the bay towards the riding lights of the anchored freighter.

Bess seemed to have muffled the oar for the boat moved very silently and after a while he stopped rowing and let it drift. He fumbled then for a moment with gear amidships and there was a splash as a light grapnel went overboard. The row-boat came to with a slight jerk and then rested easily midway between ship and shore. A match flared and Bess's face shone momentarily against the night as he lit a fresh cigarette. He seemed to be making no attempt at concealment.

Singh looked at the luminous dial of his watch. The time was half past twelve. " How long must we wait? " he asked.

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"Not long, I promise you," Bess replied, and did not speak again.

The Sikh watched the quarters round on his watch until half past one. The moon appeared fitfully through wreaths of heavy cloud, a chill wind blew, and the boat rocked on an increasing swell. There was no sign of movement from the freighter and only the single light in Cora's room broke the darkness of the shoreline and told him that she still watched and waited.

"Nobody will come," said Kartar Singh.

"It took you a long time to decide. Did you really believe that anybody would?"

Singh considered this. "No," he said at last. "I always thought it was you, but I had to be sure."

"Such caution, Mr. Singh."

"I am a business man. Cora would not take my word without proof, long as we have been together."

"I don't think you have any proof at all, Mr. Singh, but supposing I were to confirm your suspicions, could we not go on as before? The profits would be good and more than enough for all."

"Do you think Cora would let you go on?"

"Cora is old." He spoke of her affectionately, as of one who must be humoured. "She needs a strong man to guide her now. I should persuade her in the end."

"She would see you dead first."

"And you, Mr. Singh?"

"And I."

"Well then, the proposition falls down. Two could return to shore if agreement were reached between them. Otherwise one must remain behind. Would you think about that for a moment, Mr. Singh?"

He could not see Bess in the dark but he guessed how he sat there, long legs stretched out before him, hands loosely by his sides. He wondered almost dispassionately how much longer the boy would continue to sit like that and what form his attack would take when it came.

Bess spoke once again. "I see your mind is made up. You will understand that I shall have to tell Mis' Floraline of your treachery. We shall both miss you so much."

Kartar Singh cleared his throat and spoke calmly into the darkness. "I think you should know that I have a gun and that I shall use it if danger threatens."

He thought he heard Bess chuckle but the boy did not answer and the Indian called again.

"Bess, you hear that? I have a gun."

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He strained forward, trying to peer through the gloom, and half rose from his place in the bows. It was then that Bess went over the side and Singh realized the danger of his position. He teetered wildly in an effort to regain his balance, then a violent heave on the starboard gunwale sent him floundering face downwards into the sea.

There was no shock of cold, the water was warmer than the air above it, and he struck out confidently for the surface. But instead of cleaving water, his hands glanced on hard, muscular flesh, and Bess's body bore him over and down still deeper beneath the boat. He kicked out wildly and for a moment succeeded in fending the other away.

His head broke the surface just as the clouds swept clear of the moon, and by its hard white light he saw Bess coming towards him again with steel glinting in his hand. Singh's own hands went to his belt and tugged out first the useless revolver, then a clasp-knife. He gulped water, fighting to open the knife in time, then shifted the blade to his right, and closed again with Bess, fending desperately with his left against the other's knife hand.

The sea closed over their heads and boiled where they fought. Long seconds passed before one head surfaced and weary arms struck out for the boat's side. The survivor clambered inboard and knelt a moment, gasping on the thwarts, his body black against the moon. Weakly he dabbled over the side until he found the bobbing head of the second man and drew the body close alongside the boat, securing it there with a turn of the line he cut from the grapnel tackle. Then he set the oar in place again and began to row out past the silent merchant ship to where the open sea rolled into the bay.

There he cut the line and let the body drift; then turned his boat once more towards the shore. Behind him the sea boiled again in a sudden flurry of silver.

Mrs. Floraline was waiting at the head of the jetty steps. They walked together to the dark street.

"Love is blind," she observed bitterly. "Until you spoke, it didn't begin to dawn on me, but then everything fell into place and I kicked myself for a sentimental old fool. Even then I guess I had a right to hope."

"We all have that," said Kartar Singh.

"What about Bess?"

"He has gone away, Mis' Cora."

Mrs. Floraline looked at the pink, sea-diluted blood which still oozed from the strip of shirtsleeve he had tied about his wounded left arm. She nodded dully. "Will they—?"

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The Sikh shook his head. "Barracuda," he said briefly. "They are shoaling at the harbour mouth, the fishermen told me this evening." He put a hand on her arm. "I am sorry."

She shrugged her shoulders in a gesture of infinite weariness. "It was you or him, I guess."

Kartar Singh started for home, then turned back. "Mis' Cora," he began awkwardly.

"Yes?"

"You still planning to retire?"

"Retire, hell! You don't retire from a business like mine. It retires from you if you're dumb enough to let it. I'll see you in the morning, Kartar Singh, just now I've got a letter to write."

Back in her room Mrs. Floraline sat a long time with pen poised over a blank sheet of notepaper but in the end it was a Baltimore Tavern letterhead she drew towards her, scrawled across it the words, *Account Closed*, and put it in an envelope addressed to Police Chief Miller.

It was not until she had knocked up Estelle and told her to deliver the letter early next day that she went back to her room, locked the door, and lay down her on bed to weep.

★ ★ ★

SHIP AHOY

As everybody knows, we like the sea, we like the navy, and we like our biscuits dipped in gravy, so it should be no trouble for Argosy readers to answer these questions. Ketch as ketch can, and if not, turn to page 99.

1. *You row up to a ship which is flying the following flags:*
   - *i. white flag*
   - *ii. yellow flag*
   - *iii. red flag (plain)*
   - *iv. blue flag with a white square*

   What do you know about this ship?
2. *The Plimsoll line is not the line that ratings have to toe. What is it?*
3. *Can you name the ships commanded by these real and fictional characters:*
   - *i. Captain Bligh*
   - *ii. Captain Nemo*
   - *iii. Captain Queeg*
   - *iv. Captain Ahab*
4. *What is a cutty sark? Where can you see the famous one?*
5. *Where is Davy Jones's locker?*
6. *How long is a nautical mile?*
7. *What is a ship, anyway?*

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EYES OF MASSANG

" You're not afraid of the darkness? " the doctor asked

BY MARK DERBY

AS he stepped out of the boat, Dr. Stanten stumbled, and four or five brown hands shot forward to help him.

They knew, of course.

His bungalow was up there on the cliff, vividly silhouetted against the dark wall of jungle by the setting sun; but all he could see of it was a vague brown blur against blackness. And his thousand-mile journey to Singapore had confirmed that he would never see any more than that now—that he would soon see less, and one day would cease to see anything at all.

" Peace on your coming, Tuan Doctor! " the village folk were saying. " Peace on your returning! " And he thought, peace? Well, resignation was a kind of peace, and he had no alternative to resignation since he had rejected the passing temptation to make a quick end to it all with something from one of the small green bottles in his dispensary.

" You knew already, of course," the young specialist in Singapore had said, after a single swift examination.

" Yes," he'd admitted. " I knew. But a man can't help hoping."

Now hope was behind him; before him . . . what? Slowly all the lights would go out until he was alone in the darkness.

In a sense, of course, he'd been alone for fifteen years, ever since Margaret had died. But, in another sense, never alone, because the only doctor on an island with a friendly population of thirty thousand had little time for loneliness. Now, or very soon, it would all have to close down.

No hope of a successor. The small missionary society that had sent him and Margaret to the island thirty years ago had suffered heavy reductions in income. For six years they'd been unable to pay his small salary, and he had gladly gone without, so long as they kept up the supply of medicines.

And neither of the two island boys he had trained would be there to take over from him. Poor Luyoh had helped him nurse a score of islanders through polio, and then lost his own fight

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with the disease. And the clever Kerian, whom he'd finally sent to medical school in Java, had recently graduated and announced that he would not be returning.

" You are not better," one of the fisherman said, in the direct, simple manner of the islanders, as he started up the beach. " You went to Singapura to have your eyes made good, but they are still bad. Why is that? "

He answered in the island language with the grave courtesy with which he always replied to their candid questions, " I am an old man, my friend, and my eyes are too old for healing."

" Ah! " The murmur of dismay and sympathy followed the tall, grey-headed figure up the steps to the clifftop bungalow. " Come and see me after supper," he called down to them. " And the sick after sunrise tomorrow, as usual."

As usual. Well, almost as usual. The supper, served on the verandah by Akomu, who had been young with him and was now growing old with him, with the stars and fireflies gemming the darkness over the sea, and the portrait of Margaret smiling from the corner. And afterwards the usual soft, naked footsteps on the house ladder and a dozen of his neighbours lining the breeze-cool verandah to share his after-supper smoke and chat. Usual enough, too, the hesitant figure appearing under the verandah just as he was ready for bed.

" Who comes? " he asked, blinking through the soft lamplight.

" It is Massang," came the reply.

Massang? There must be twenty youngsters called Massang in the village.

" Who is sick, then? " he inquired.

The boy came a couple of paces out of the shadows. " *You* are sick, Tuan Doctor."

James Stanten sat down again. " It is true, Massang," he said. And this wasn't so usual after all, somebody so young calling late except in an emergency. He recognized him now, a young fisherman who regularly brought him gifts of fish. Must have pulled him through an illness some time. He saw him dimly, a youth of eighteen or so, in an olive sarong and a yellow turban with long streamers. " My eyes are too old for the big doctors in Singapura to mend," he told him.

" That is why I came," the boy said.

Dr. Stanten said, " It was good of you to call." He checked a yawn, for the three-day plane-and-boat journey from Singapore had tired him. " Our troubles are easier when friends are near."

The boy showed no sign of leaving. He had crossed the verandah and sat himself cross-legged by the doctor's chair. " We in this island," he said, " know how strong your medicine is, how

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often you wrestle with death himself and throw him. And some of us know how you are able to cure a sick person, not with medicine, but with health taken from another person."

James Stanten understood. "You speak of the widow up the hill who was dying because her blood was sick. Yes, I took blood from her neighbour and replaced the sick blood and soon she was well. You speak of her?"

"My mother," the boy said. "That was the strongest magic our people have ever seen."

"That was no magic, my son," the doctor protested.

"It is what we call magic," the boy insisted, "and that is why I have come."

"You come from your mother?"

"No, Tuan Doctor, for she is never sick now, with her new blood. I come because it would be an ill fate for all of us here if you became truly blind."

"There is no if, my boy."

"But I know," Massang went on, ignoring the interpolation, "that you are able to take health from one body to another which needs it. So I have come, Tuan Doctor, because my eyes are strong."

James Stanten had finished his bedtime pipe, but with a deliberate gesture he opened his tobacco tin again. This was going to take longer than he'd expected.

"My mother," Massang was saying, "lives because another's blood was put into her body. If you lost your old, worn-out eyes and found strong new ones you could see again. So I ask you to take mine."

The doctor betrayed no reaction beyond grave attention. Any abrupt exposure of the absurdity of the boy's offer was out of the question. Such shining goodness of heart deserved better than that.

"I will tell you how good my eyes are," the eager young voice insisted. "When we were all on the cliff this afternoon, watching for your boat, I sighted it long before any of the others. I was the first."

"And when you saw that I had not been cured in Singapura," the doctor suggested, "you thought you would come and offer me your eyes?"

The boy leaned swiftly forward. "No, Tuan Doctor. When men first said you were perhaps going blind, four or five moons ago, I thought of it. But I have told nobody. It is a good plan, because you could make such good use of my eyes—healing the dying and bringing back happiness to the hearts that are breaking

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for fear of losing their dear ones. And what do I use them for? Just to stare about the sea while I fish, and look at the girls when I come ashore. If I was blind I could still make fishing-lines and play my pipe."

The doctor asked, "You are not afraid of the darkness, my son?"

"A little," Massang admitted. "But I would not be alone. Ajang, my cousin, is blind, too. And when you are blind, people's hearts are tender to you. That I have seen."

"I have seen it, too," the doctor agreed. "Already."

There was silence then, while he thought. In Singapore, surrounded by a million people who didn't know me or care whether I was alive or dead, I was homesick for this. And he remembered a phrase of Margaret's: home is where love is. I have come home.

But he must give his mind to the problem of sending this boy away happy. What reply could possibly match the innocent generosity of the offer? He turned to meet the steady, frank gaze of those handsome eyes, and suddenly the answer came to him.

"Massang, my son," he said, and the boy's fine eyes blinked in the lamplight and the slender body straightened to attention, "it is truly a wonderful gift you have brought me. And not only to me, but to all the good folk of this island who may still need my help. There is not much I can see nowadays, but I see your good heart clearly."

Massang said nothing.

"So splendid a gift cannot be refused," the old doctor went on. "My friends and neighbours here still need help, but how could I help them with eyes that are almost dead? I might mistake one of the little bottles and give poison instead of healing medicine. I can no longer see to count the drops of the strongest medicine. These people need my skill and your eyes, both together. Come back at sunrise tomorrow."

The boy rose to his feet. "I shall come, Tuan Doctor. But can I come a little later than sunrise? There is the daughter of Saloh, the boatbuilder. Soon, in the next moon, she and I are to be married. I would like to see her once more."

With his hand on the slim brown shoulder, the doctor said, "My son, you will see her as long as your life together lasts. Because, Massang, there is an easier way of accepting your gift. We will work together, you and I, and your eyes will be my eyes, watching the little bottles and the drops of medicine, and studying the wounds and symptoms I can no longer see. Your strong eyes will watch all that I do and you will listen to my words and explanations, and if we work hard together, one day you will be

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a doctor, too, and serve your people here when I am in my grave. And you will see your bride every morning as the sun rises and sometimes you will be able to take out your boat and fish again."

" But I have sold my boat and given away my nets," Massang said. " An hour ago."

James Stanten was silent for a moment, remembering other fishermen who had left boats and nets long ago to follow a new Master in perfect trust. Blasphemy? No, because surely this lad belonged somewhere in their company. He felt unworthy, unequal to partnership with such guileless devotion.

He turned out the oil lamp, so that they stood close together in the thin starlight. " There will always be a boat and a net if I ask to borrow one," he assured the boy. " Come in the morning. There will surely be many sick waiting for us after ten days with no doctor."

" I shall be here at sunrise," Massang promised. " Good night, Tuan Doctor."

And James Stanten, whose prayers for a son had never been answered, said, " Good night, my son."

TOP OF THE TREE

From next month's ARGOSY, on sale December 10, out of a host of good things for the holiday season come these highlights of our Christmas programme

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Bucket of Love

How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood
When deep introspection presents them to view!
How joyous the paths in the deep-tangled wild wood
Of symbols, repressions my infancy knew!

The orchard, the meadow, the wide-spreading pond
(A substitute earth-mother of whom I was fond),
The bridge where I stood and the rock that I threw
(At the waterfall father, and the sibling all new).
The symbols are clear, the meanings all jell
Except for a *bucket* that hung in the well.

The well-water bubbled (for boyhood purity)
To wash off the dirt on my face (insecurity),
And the dream of the river, the mill wheel awhirl,
Told me I knew Pa had wanted a girl.
The patterned rejection was easy to tell
But what was that *bucket* that hung in the well?

Now far removed from the loved habitation
I see my regressions and projected hell
When fancy reverts to my father's frustration
And brings on the symptoms I know oh so well.

But what *is* that *bucket*, that old *oaken* bucket,
That *iron-bound* bucket, that *moss-covered* bucket
That *hung* there, that hung *there*, that hung *in* the *well*?

M. PHILIP STERN, *The Analyst's Lament*

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★ *She began respectably in Vaudeville—variety, in other words—which itself started in Boston in 1883 with Benjamin Franklin Keith's Gaiety Museum, containing a stuffed mermaid and Baby Alice the midget. Vaudeville died a natural death after the Keith-Albee and Orpheum theatre circuits amalgamated in 1928, ousted by the rival attractions of the talkies and burlesque, i.e. strip-tease.*

"Your poor grandfather would turn in his grave," Mother said when Gypsy Rose Lee got her first burlesque engagement, and sister June Havoc sent a postcard: "How could you stoop to burlesque! You have disgraced all of us." But Gypsy Rose went gaily ahead, and later the famous columnist Walter Winchell exclaimed in approval, "There's something healthy about females like that!" Here is the hilarious account of the first show that set her on the burlesque path.

GRASS SKIRT AND SEQUINS

BY GYPSY ROSE LEE

MY sister, June, was thirteen years old when she eloped with one of the boys in our vaudeville act. I was fifteen and a half. There was no act left, without June, until Mother decided, one day, to pick up the tangled threads of her life, as she put it, and organize another company.

The new act was all girls—Mother wasn't taking any more chances. It was named "Madam Rose's Hollywood Blondes." Mother had called herself Madam Rose for many years—ever since we were top of the bill on the Orpheum Circuit. There were six girls in the new act besides me. Mother found them in dancing-schools and amateur contests in Seattle, our home town. None of them received a salary; Mother convinced their parents the experience the girls would receive would be worth more than money.

The oldest girl, little Mary, was sixteen, but so tiny everyone thought she couldn't be over ten. Two of the girls, Nancy and Millie, were sisters. They were comediennes in the act so they didn't have to be pretty. Nancy's blonde head sat on her long, thin neck like a jonquil. Millie sang June's comedy number and

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did a bustle dance with me. The braces on her teeth added to the comic effect. None of the girls could do my sister's ballad about her little dog, but Ruby did a contortion dance in place of it. Contortionists didn't have to be pretty, either.

Ruby's neck was even longer than Nancy's. Her legs were long too and thin, with red chapped knees that looked like candied apples on sticks. The brassière part of her costume was ruffled to hide the two tiny swellings that embarrassed her when she did the back bends.

Then there was Dorothy with her big brown eyes and sweet little singing voice and Hazel, the only one of the girls with any stage experience. Hazel, who was thirteen, had appeared in six dancing-school recitals. I sang *I'm a Hard-boiled Rose*, in a striped skirt and comedy jacket. I had been doing the same number since I was four years old—mainly because I couldn't learn a new one.

At a quarter to twelve we were on our way to the theatre, all except Hazel, who had been sent on ahead in a taxi with the scenery and costumes. We all wore scarves tied twice around our necks and fastened with safety pins.

Dorothy, carrying two dolls and an armful of gilded guns, ran up beside me. "Wait for me, Louise. I don't want to walk alone on this awful-looking street."

I hadn't noticed anything unusual until she mentioned it, but then I saw what she meant. There was something sinister about it. The all-night cinema we were passing, for instance, with the lurid pictures out front advertising *Pitfalls of Passion*.

We passed a barber shop with a sign in the window reading: *Tattooing Artfully Done*. Samples of the artist's work decorated the sign. One was of a woman clinging to a rock with MOTHER written under it, the other, a dagger being thrust through the skin of an arm.

Nancy let out a whoop. "There it is, there's the theatre!"

Next door to a hotel advertising beds for fifty cents was the Missouri Theatre. In electric lights was the word BURLESQUE. Mother closed her eyes, then opened them, as though during that time the sight ahead might have been altered. A canvas banner hanging from the portico read:

40 GIRLS 40
Burlesque As You Like It
40 GIRLS 40

"*Burlesque!*" Mother gasped. "Sam wouldn't dare do a thing like this to us."

She advanced on the theatre, a steely glint in her eyes. "Wait

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here," she said, " and stay close together. I'm going in to get Hazel."

She made it sound as though she was about to rescue Hazel from a burning building, but I knew exactly how she felt. Vaudeville performers looked down on Burlesque. For an act to appear in such a theatre was professional suicide. Mother took a deep breath before she opened the stage door and strode purposefully through it.

While we waited, the girls and I watched a man on a ladder adjust an electric fan under the theatre portico. He was aiming the breeze from it down on a larger-than-life-sized photograph of a blonde woman who wore nothing but a triangle patch where she should have worn panties and two smaller patches for a brassière. Another man was nailing black silk tassels to the brassière part of the photograph. As he stepped aside the breeze from the fan picked up the tassels and made them spin like windmills.

The girls and I inched closer to the foyer so that we could see more. The animated picture of the blonde had silver-flittered letters nailed round the head, and above it, in flittered letters that sparkled like rhinestones, was her billing: *Tessie, the Tassel Twirler.*

In the foyer there were other life-sized photographs. The women in them were all half naked; each of them peeked out from behind something such as a parasol, a fur muff, or a balloon.

Millie, her eyes like saucers, nudged me. " Look at that! " she said pointing to an easel that read: *Wine, Women, and Song. Beauty! Form! Shimmy!* At the bottom of a long list of names was " Madam Rose's Hollywood Blondes."

" We're not even top of the bill," Millie whispered. " Wait'll Madam Rose sees that."

We scooted back to where Mother had told us to wait, and just in time, too. Mother, holding Hazel by the arm, was marching up the aisle from the stage. At the same moment a taxi stopped at the kerb and Sam, the agent, got out.

" Did ya bring the pictures for the lobby? " he asked.

" Pictures? " Mother said, glaring at him. " Do you think for one minute I'd let these innocent little girls appear in this filthy dive? "

" Dive? " Sam repeated. " This happens to be one-a the cream-de-la-cream houses on the whole Burlesque wheel. Plenty of acts'd give their eye teeth to play in this theatre."

" Not our little act! " Mother said. " Come along girls, we're going back to the hotel! "

" Now, wait a minute," the agent said. " I okayed this deal.

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You walk out on me and I'll blacklist you in every theatre in Kansas City—"

Little Mary began to cry. "What are we going to do, Madam Rose?" she wailed. "Where can we go? We're stranded!"

The word stranded was all the other girls needed. They weren't sure what it meant, neither was little Mary, but it had a terrifying ring to it. Nancy's face screwed up, then she began to blubber and they all started. The agent, his polo coat flying behind him, ran from one girl to another pleading with them to be quiet. "Not in fronta the theatre," he begged. "If you gotta bawl, for Pete's sake bawl inside, we got trouble enough with the cops. Let's go inside, Rose, and talk it over."

Mother pulled her arm away from his hand. "I'd rather starve first!"

"Well, I wouldn't," I said, and the sound of my own voice startled me. For the first time in my life I had contradicted Mother. "I mean it," I said. "I'm tired of starving to death. That's all we've been doing for years—even before June left us—"

Mother caught her breath in a tight gasp, and I was afraid for a moment she was going to have an asthma attack.

"You don't know what you're saying," she cried. "Something will turn up. It always has and it always will."

"Nothing better is ever going to turn up for us, Mother. There's no place left for us to work any more." I picked up my bag and walked towards the stage entrance. "We'll play the date," I told the agent. "We need the money."

As I walked down the alley I knew Mother and the girls were following me because I heard Mother sobbing.

There was a star on the door, but even so it was the dirtiest dressing-room I had ever seen. Mother wrinkled up her nose at the stale, sour odour. I hesitated in the doorway, "The doorman told us to take one of the empty rooms," I said.

For an answer Mother moved a few of the sweat-stained, sleazy costumes to make room on the hooks for ours. Ruby, surveying the littered make-up shelf, picked up a glittering patch of rhinestones and held it to her thin neck.

"It's kinda big for a necklace," she murmured.

"Put that down!" Mother commanded. "Don't touch anything in this room. You don't know *what* you might catch!"

A blonde woman wearing a black satin dress stood framed in the doorway, her hands on her big soft-looking hips. "Of all the gawddamn nerve," she said. "The only thing you'll catch round here is a swift kick in the butt if you don't leave my stuff alone!"

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She was fatter and older-looking than in her picture, but I knew this was Tessie, the Tassel Twirler.

"Hey, you with the neck," she said to Ruby. "I just paid six bucks for that G string. It's no play toy. Put it down."

Ruby was too frightened to move. The woman strode into the room and snatched the glittering thing from Ruby's hands. "Who told you to come busting in here like it was a public bath?"

"The door was open," I said. "We've always had the star dressing-room and I assumed we'd have—"

"Oh, you did, huh? Well, you can just assume yourselves to hell out."

"We'll see who gets out," Mother said. "Girls, unpack the make-up!"

The blonde's anger left her like the air sputtering out of a busted balloon. She flopped onto a chair and let her head hang down between her legs. "Ohmigawd," she moaned, "what a hangover I got. I love my drink, but it sure don't love me . . . Why I slop up all that damn beer when I know I got a rehearsal the next day I dunno."

Mother picked up the music case. "Stand by for rehearsal," she said; then with a slight curl to her lips, she added, "and no talking to strangers."

The blonde gazed up at her sadly and belched. "I wanta apologize," she said when the belch was over. "I didn't mean to chew your heads off like I did—it's just that I got this lousy hangover—then to find a troupe of acrobats sprawled all over my room—"

"But we are not acrobats," Mother said witheringly. "We happen to be a vaudeville act. We were booked into this theatre by mistake."

"Weren't we all!" the blonde exclaimed; then she belched again.

A voice called out in the hallway, "Everybody onstage for the opening number. Step on it. We're late gettin' started."

The hallway began filling up with chorus girls wearing red satin brassières and abbreviated pants to match. The pants were open at the sides and held together with pink elastic straps that cut into the flesh, making their hips look corrugated. Long red satin tails were attached to the backs of the pants. The girls' hair was tucked up under red satin skull-caps with tiny horns at the ears. Each girl carried a spear and, as they ran chattering and complaining towards the stage, they poked one another playfully with the pointed ends.

In a moment the orchestra played the introduction to *Lucky*

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Little Devil and the chorus girls pranced lackadaisically onstage singing the lyrics of the song in several different keys. The stage hands yelled even louder than the chorus girls as they gave instructions to one another: "Let that tab in a few inches—O.K., now tie it off and bring in the front traveller—not so fast—give the broads a chance to finish the number—"

"Is it always this exciting on opening days?" Nancy bubbled. "I love all the noise and the people running around—"

Then we heard our music and Mother's voice as she gave the orchestra leader our cues. I tugged at my long brown stockings and walked down the hallway to the stage. The girls, staying close together, followed me. The stage hands watched us as we took our places for the rehearsal of our opening number.

"*This* is supposed to keep the cops out?" one of them remarked.

"Yeah," another one said. "Next week *East Lynne*."

The agent sat in the front row of the gloomy auditorium with another man who looked just like him. "You won't recognize 'em when they get their make-up on," he was saying. "The costumes and lights help a lot, too, ya know."

"I hope so," the other man said grimly.

The orchestra leader pounded out our music on the piano and the girls and I tried to pretend we couldn't hear the men as we went through our act.

"That big one," the man said, "can she talk?"

"Sure, talks great," Sam replied. "Why? You wanna use her?"

"Maybe. I dunno yet. Think she could handle the Illusion scene?"

"Sure," Sam said expansively. "They don't look like much but they all got a loada talent."

"Hey—you," the man yelled suddenly and loudly. "You, the big one on the end." The music stopped and the girls and I looked at one another. Little Mary was on one end of the line. I was on the other.

"Do you mean me?" I asked, my voice going funny on the last word.

"Yeah. Lift up your skirts and lemme see your legs."

"Her *what*?" Mother screamed from the wings.

"It's nothing, Rose," Sam yelled reassuringly. "This is Herbie Michaels, the boss. He just wants to see if she's bow-legged or something—"

"Rose Louise is not showing her legs and that's final!" Mother said firmly, striding on stage.

"All right, all right," Sam muttered, waving her off into the

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wings. He turned to Herbie Michaels. "You can take my personal word for it. The legs are O.K."

The stage hands were moving a big pink satin-lined seashell onstage behind us.

"Speed it up, will ya?" Sam yelled up to me. Mother ran out onstage with the gilded guns and hurriedly shoved them at us, then called out the directions from the wings as we went through our Military Finale dance.

Before we could get offstage the chorus girls were dancing on, dressed as sea sprites. "Where's Gladys?" someone yelled, and a girl with brassy red hair, wearing a flowered print robe, scurried across the stage, sat herself in the seashell, took her knitting out of a bag, and began to count off the stitches. "Knit two, purl two, knit two . . ."

"Isn't it exciting?" Nancy whispered. "This is what I always dreamt show business would be like."

It wasn't like any show business I'd ever known, but I had to admit it was exciting. I glanced back at the undersea ballet number and turned my head away quickly. Gladys had dropped her knitting and was standing up in the seashell with nothing on but a string of big fake pearls.

The girls and I walked, close together, back to the dressing-room. "I'm not going to write home about this," Millie said thoughtfully. "Mom isn't professional enough to understand."

In our dressing-room we took off our street clothes and hung them on the hooks we had cleared for ourselves. We were busily passing the community powder puff when there was a knock on the door.

"Don't come in," we screamed in a chorus, "we're not dressed."

The door flew open and Herbie Michaels stood there with a man in a funny sailor suit. The girls and I grabbed for make-up towels, kimonos, anything at all to cover our long underwear, but the men didn't appear to be looking at us.

"We want ya to be happy here, Joe," Herbie was saying to the man in the sailor suit. "We just done the Dirty Restaurant or you could do that, but if you wanna do the Illusion scene, O.K., we got a fine talking woman to play it with ya. She's that big one over there."

They both looked at me and I tried to shrink so the make-up towel would cover me.

"Will she do?" Herbie Michaels asked.

"Who's got a choice?" the man in the sailor suit replied.

"Get hold uv a hula skirt," Herbie Michaels threw over his

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shoulder at me as he left. The man he called Joe sat down in Tessie's chair and bent his rubber cigar back and forth.

"Ever done the Illusion scene before?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Well, it don't matter," he replied. "I do a rehash on it anyway. I don't use none of that Tondelayo dialogue. After the patter with Stinky, the stooge, the lights come up and you're lying stage left in front of a grass hut. I give you a skull, then a slow triple, and you get up and start giving me the business. You do about four bars uv bumps and grinds while I chew a hunk outta the grass hut, then you throw me your lines, 'I'm no illusion,' you say. 'I'm real—here, take my hand—touch me, feel me.'"

"I'm no illusion," I repeated slowly. "I'm real, here, take my hand, touch me, feel me."

"Great," the comic said, "you got it already. You scram on the blackout and I finish the scene with Stinky."

"What finish?" I asked faintly.

"The old tried and true. Is that clear?" Then without waiting for my answer, he walked out of the room and left me standing there behind the make-up towel, confused and bewildered.

Mother was delighted when I told her about the scene but Tessie wasn't. "It detracts from your prestige," she said. "Look at me, for instance. I do only two numbers. One in the first half uv the show, the other in the second. In Burlesque, you gotta leave 'em hungry for more. You don't dump the whole roast on the platter."

She didn't approve of the hula skirt, either. I had it hooked on around my waist, and she pulled it down low on my hips. I tugged it back up again. "I couldn't wear it down there," I said. "My navel shows."

"I'll fix that," Tessie said. Rummaging through the mess on the cluttered make-up shelf, she found a red pear-shaped jewel and, putting a bit of glue on the back, she stuck the bauble on my stomach. "There," she said, "how's that?"

It looked silly, but I didn't want to hurt her feelings, and I had to admit the skirt was better round my hips; it didn't make me look so fat that way.

"I like a covered navel," Tessie said. "It's more classy."

Then she looked down at my patent-leather dancing-shoes. "You can't wear those. They make you look like a comic. Here—put these on." She fished a pair of gold high-heeled sandals out of the litter under the make-up shelf and tossed them to me.

I'd had on high heels only once before. I had the same feeling

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now as I had then, as though I were going to fall flat on my face.

"You oughta see how much better ya look," Tessie said approvingly. "For a kid, you got a lot of sex in your walk."

Mother came hurrying into the room. "Hurry, dear," she said. "The Illusion scene is next. My, how nice you look." Then she looked at me more closely. "Pull up that skirt!" she commanded.

I ran out of the room and down the hallway. "Louise! You come back here and take off those ridiculous shoes and pull up that hula skirt!"

I ran as fast as I could towards the stage. Then I heard Tessie calling Mother, and they were both behind me. I stood in the wings, nervously waiting for my cue. Mother was right and I knew it. The shabby gold shoes were silly. The red stone glittering in my navel was vulgar and ugly. The lights suddenly blacked out. That was my cue but I couldn't move.

"I can't do it," I cried. "I can't go on!"

"The hell you can't," Tessie said, giving me a shove. "There ain't anything you can't do. You got the world on a string, kid, and don't you forget it."

Peeking around the side of the grass hut I could see Joe and Stinky lying on the mat. "Six long months on this godforsaken island," Joe was saying. "Six months and not a human being in sight!"

"What am I," Stinky mumbled, "chopped liver?"

"There you are, my beautiful darling," Joe cried throwing his arms around Stinky. "I can't get you out of my mind. Your eyes are like burning pools, your lips are like rubies, your teeth like pearls—are you following me?"

"Following you, hell," Stinky chortled, "I'm way ahead of you."

The lights blacked out and Stinky passed me in the darkness. "You're on," he whispered, and I found my way to the front of the hut before the lights came up.

"You *are* real!" Joe cried as he saw me. "You're not an illusion—"

"Louise!" Mother whispered from the wings. "Hold in your stomach!"

I took a deep breath, "I'm real," I said. "I'm no illusion—here, take my hand, touch me—feel me—"

Tessie greeted me as I stumbled into the wings on the blackout. "There, that wasn't so tough, was it?"

I looked back at the comics who were doing what I presumed was the tried and true. "He said he was going to give me a skull," I murmured. "I guess he forgot."

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Tessie roared with laughter. "A skull's a take," she said. Then seeing the question in my eyes, she added, "He gives you a slow look, then he looks away, and looks back again—that's a take, a skull, see?"

Back in the dressing-room, the girls were already dressed in their opening-number costumes.

"Take that thing out of your navel," Mother said.

I picked out the red bauble and laid it on Tessie's place on the make-up shelf, then I put on the cretonne pinafore and my hair bow and snatched up my walking doll.

Mother, leading the way, escorted us onstage.

Flossie the ingénue was finishing her song, *I'm Looking at the World through Rose-colcured Glasses*, and at the end of each phrase, she crinkled her newspaper costume provocatively. There didn't seem to be any connection between the song and the costume but from the occasional hoots of approval from the audience, I knew they liked her. I squeezed closer to the wings so I could see better.

I had seen the runway at rehearsal and wondered what it was used for. Now, as Flossie stepped daintily onto it, I knew. It was a narrow strip, with a frosted-glass floor, extending out into the audience over the heads of the men who sat alongside it. As Flossie wiggled the newspaper costume at a bald-headed man, lights came on under the glass floor and made her bluish legs take on a rosy glow.

She tore off a strip of the newspaper and tickled the man with it, then with a little cry of girlish abandon she darted towards the wings. Just before the exit, she tore off a larger piece of the newspaper and her whole backside was bare—all but the pink net pants which hardly showed at all. There was a bit of scattered applause and a lot of hooting and hollering from the audience.

The orchestra played *Whispering* and Flossie came out again, tearing at the newspaper, this time in a slower tempo. As she tore off the strips, she rolled them into balls and threw them into the audience. She danced out onto the runway and asked a man in the audience to help her. "Would ya, Daddy?" she asked in a baby voice.

The man struggled to his feet, holding his overcoat with one arm. He winked at the men sitting beside him and made for the runway and slapped Flossie on her net-covered bottom. He appeared to be quite pleased with himself as he sat down. Flossie, squealing, limped off the runway. Just as she reached the wings, she tore off the last bit of newspaper covering her front, and

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rolling it into a ball held up her arms to cover herself. The audience yelled, " Take it off! " and Flossie obligingly revealed her breasts that were cupped in soiled flesh-coloured net like two used teabags.

Someone tapped me on the shoulder and I jumped a foot. " You're on after the next scene," the man said. It was Herbie Michaels and he was smiling at me. " You looked great in the scene," he said.

The orchestra played the introduction to the Doll Dance. There was a surprised silence from the audience as the girls and I walked our dolls onstage in time to the music. Mother, in the wings, whispered, " Count four, Louise, then start." I counted to myself, then made the doll kick out a chubby leg.

The piano-player had a container of beer beside him. He raised it to his lips and took a swig as he played our music with one hand. The girls and I walked the dolls through the routine. " Forte on the last eight bars," Mother hissed and the music swelled as we walked the dolls off the stage.

Then I was on in my " tough " number. " I will now sing a little number entitled ' When your hand itches you're going to get something—when your head itches you got it '—I'm a Hard-boiled Rose—"

Matches flared up here and there in the darkness and I realized the men were lighting cigarettes. The smoke threw a glow around the spotlight. My eyes became accustomed to the haze and I could make out the figures of the men in the front row. They sat slouched way down in their seats, their feet up on the orchestra railing. Their faces were expressionless as they looked up at me. But there were a few laughs from the balcony. At the end of my number there was a bit of applause. Not the kind of applause Flossie received, but enough anyway.

When the Finale was over Mother helped us hang up our costumes. " The orchestra just about butchered our music," she said, " but all in all, it was a pretty good opening show."

Sam and Herbie Michaels agreed with Mother. Before the night performance, we had signed to stay on for another week. I was to have a new hula skirt with a higher waistband on it, and the following week, if the scenes were ladylike and met with Mother's approval, I was to appear in several of them.

As Mother said, it all came under the heading of experience.

★ ★ ★

The best way to keep a man is in doubt.

FRANKLIN P. JONES

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TIP ON

A DEAD JOCKEY

LLOYD BARBER was lying on his bed reading *France-Soir* when the phone rang. It was only two o'clock in the afternoon, but it was raining for the fifth consecutive day and he had no place to go anyway.

He was reading about the relative standing of the teams in the Rugby leagues. He never went to Rugby games and he had no interest in the relative standings of Lille and Pau and Bordeaux, but he had finished everything else in the paper.

It was cold in the small, dark room, because there was no heating provided between ten in the morning and six in the evening, and he lay on the lumpy double bed, his shoes off, covered with his overcoat.

He picked up the phone, and the man at the desk downstairs said, " There is a lady waiting for you here, Monsieur Barber."

Barber squinted at himself in the mirror above the bureau across from the bed. He wished he was better-looking. " Did she give her name? " he asked.

" No, Monsieur. Should I demand it? "

" Never mind," Barber said. " I'll be right down."

He hung up the phone and put on his shoes. He always put the left one on first, for luck. He buttoned his collar and pulled his tie into place, noticing that it was frayed at the knot. He got into his jacket and patted his pockets to see if he had cigarettes. He had no cigarettes. He shrugged, and left the light on vindictively, because the manager was being unpleasant about the bill, and went downstairs.

Maureen Richardson was sitting in the little room off the lobby, in one of those age-coloured plush chairs that fourth-rate Parisian

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BY IRWIN SHAW

hotels furnish for their clientele to discourage excessive conviviality on the ground floor. None of the lamps was lit, and a dark, dead, greenish light filtered in through the dusty curtains from the rainy street outside. Maureen had been a young, pretty girl with bright, credulous blue eyes when Barber first met her, during the war, just before she married Jimmy Richardson. But she had had two children since then and Richardson hadn't done so well, and now she was wearing a worn cloth coat that was soaked, and her complexion had gone, and in the greenish lobby light she seemed bone-coloured and her eyes were pale.

"Hullo, Beauty," Barber said. Richardson always called her that, and while it had amused his friends in the squadron, he had loyally stuck to it, and finally everyone had picked it up.

Maureen turned round quickly, almost as though he had frightened her. "Lloyd," she said. "I'm so glad I found you in."

They shook hands, and Barber asked if she wanted to go some place for a coffee.

"I'd rather not," Maureen said. "I left the kids with a friend for lunch and I promised I'd collect them at two-thirty and I don't have much time."

"Sure," Barber said. "How's Jimmy?"

"Oh Lloyd . . ." Maureen pulled at her fingers, and Barber noticed that they were reddened and the nails were uneven. "Have you seen him?"

"What?" Barber peered through the gloom at her, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Have you seen him?" Maureen persisted. Her voice was thin and frightened.

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"Not for a month or so," Barber said. "Why?" He asked it, but he almost knew why.

"He's gone, Lloyd," Maureen said. "He's been gone thirty-two days. I don't know what I'm going to do."

"Where did he go?" Barber asked.

"I don't know." Maureen took out a packet of cigarettes and lit one. She was too distracted to offer them to Barber. "He didn't tell me." She smoked the cigarette avidly but absently. "I'm so worried. I thought maybe he'd said something to you—or that you'd bumped into him."

"No," Barber said carefully. "He didn't say anything."

"It's the queerest thing. We've been married over ten years and he never did anything like this before," Maureen said, trying to control her voice. "He just came to me one night and he said he'd got leave of absence from his job for a month and that he'd be back within thirty days and he'd tell me all about it when he got back, and he begged me not to ask any questions."

"And you didn't ask any questions?"

"He was acting so strangely," Maureen said. "I'd never seen him like that before. All on edge. Excited. You might even say happy, except that he kept going in all night to look at the kids. And he's never given me anything to worry about in the—the girl department," Maureen said primly. "Not like some of the other boys we know. And if there was one thing about Jimmy, it was that you could trust him. So I helped him pack."

"What did he take?"

"Just one holdall," Maureen said. "With light clothes. As though he was going off on a summer holiday. He even took a tennis racket."

"A tennis racket." Barber nodded, as though it was the most natural thing in the world for husbands to take tennis rackets along when disappearing. "Have you heard from him at all?"

"No," Maureen said. "He told me he wouldn't write. Did you ever hear of anything like that?" Even in her anguish, she permitted herself a tone of wifely grievance. "I knew we shouldn't have come to Europe. It's different for you. You're not married and you were always kind of wild anyway, not like Jimmy—"

"Did you phone his office?" Barber asked, interrupting. He didn't want to hear how wild people thought he was, or how unmarried.

"I asked a friend to phone," Maureen said. "It would look too fishy his wife ringing up to ask where he was."

"What did they say?"

"They said that they had expected him two days ago but he hadn't come in yet."

Barber took one of Maureen's cigarettes and lit it. It was the first one in four hours and it tasted wonderful. He had a little selfish twinge of gratitude that Maureen had come to his hotel.

"Lloyd, do you know anything?" Maureen asked, worn and shabby in her damp, thin coat in the foggy green light.

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Barber hesitated. " No," he said. " But I'll put in a couple of calls and I'll telephone you tomorrow."

They both stood up. Maureen pulled on gloves over her reddened hands. The gloves were worn and greenish-black.

Looking at them, Barber suddenly remembered how neat and shining Maureen had been when they first met, in Louisiana, so many years before, and how healthy and well-dressed he and Jimmy and the others had been in their lieutenants' uniforms with their new wings up.

" Listen, Beauty," Barber said, " how are you fixed for money? "

" I didn't come over for that," Maureen said firmly.

Barber took out his wallet and peered judiciously into it. It wasn't necessary. He knew exactly what was there. He took out a five-thousand-franc note. " Here," he said, handing it to her. " Try this on for size."

Maureen made a motion as though to give it back to him. " I really don't think I should . . ." she began.

" Sh-h-h, Beauty," Barber said. " There isn't an American girl in Paris who couldn't use five mille on a day like this."

Maureen sighed and put the note in her handbag. " I feel terrible about taking your money, Lloyd."

Barber kissed her forehead. " In memory of the wild blue yonder," he said, pocketing the wallet, with its remaining fifteen thousand francs, which, as far as he knew, would have to last him for the rest of his life. " Jimmy'll give it back to me."

" Do you think he's all right? " Maureen asked, standing close to him.

" Of course," Lloyd said lightly and falsely. " There's nothing to worry about. I'll ring you tomorrow. He'll probably be there answering the phone, getting sore at me for hanging round his wife when he's out of town."

" I bet." Maureen smiled miserably. She went through the cavelike murk of the lobby, out into the rainy street, on her way to pick up the two children, who had been sent out to lunch at the home of a friend.

Barber went to his room and picked up the phone and waited for the old man downstairs to plug in. There were two suitcases standing open on the floor, with shirts piled in them, because there wasn't enough drawer space in the tiny bureau supplied by the hotel.

On top of the bureau there were: a bill, marked overdue, from a tailor; a letter from his ex-wife, in New York, saying she had found an Army pistol of his in the bottom of a trunk and asking him what he wanted her to do with it; a letter from his mother, telling him to stop being a damn fool and come home and get a regular job; a letter from a woman in whom he was not interested, inviting him to come and stay with her in her villa near Eze, where it was beautiful and warm, she said, and where she needed a man about the house.

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Barber hadn't answered his ex-wife, because he had come to Europe to try to forget her. He hadn't answered his mother, either, because he was afraid she was right. And he hadn't gone down to Eze, because no matter how broke he was, he wasn't selling that particular commodity yet.

There was a whistling, static-like sound in the phone, and he shook himself and gave the number of the Hôtel George V. When he got through, he asked for Monsieur Smith, Monsieur Bert Smith. After a while, the girl said Monsieur Smith was no longer at the hotel. Barber asked hurriedly, before the girl could cut him off, whether Monsieur Smith was expected to return shortly or if he had left a forwarding address. No, the girl said after a long wait, he was not expected to return and there was no forwarding address.

Barber hung up. He was not surprised about Bert Smith. He was a man who wandered mysteriously from hotel to hotel, and he might have used half a dozen names besides Smith since Barber had spoken to him last.

Scowling, Barber went over to the window. The winter rain of Paris was seeping down into the narrow street, blurring it with the unproductive malice of city rain, chipping colourlessly at the buildings opposite, making it impossible to imagine what they had looked like when they were new. A workman was unloading cases of wine from a truck, looking persecuted by the weather, the Paris sound of clinking bottles muted and made hollow and mournful by the flow of grey water from the skies and from window ledges and signs and rolled awnings.

It was not a day for a husband to be missing, for a friend to be missing: not a day to be alone or to have only fifteen thousand francs in your pocket or to be in a narrow hotel room where the heating was off from ten in the morning till six at night: not a day to be without a job or cigarettes or lunch. It was not a day on which to examine yourself and realize that no matter how many excuses you gave yourself, you were going to wind up knowing that, finally, you were responsible.

Barber shook himself again. There was no sense in just staying in the room all day. If he was going to do any good, he would have to find Bert Smith. He glanced at his watch. It was nearly two-thirty. Barber looked at the newspaper. They were running at Auteuil today.

If he was not at the races and if he was still in Paris, Bert Smith was likely to be in one art gallery or another in the middle of the afternoon. Bert Smith was an art lover, or at least he bought pictures, shrewdly and knowingly. Since Smith lived in hotel rooms, which were unlikely places for a collection, it was probable that he bought paintings on speculation or as an agent or, when they were important ones that the government did not wish to have leave the country, to be smuggled out of France.

Barber had also seen Smith late in the afternoons in the Turkish Baths, a small, round man with surprisingly well-shaped legs, sitting in the vapour, wrapped in a sheet, growing pinker and

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pinker, smiling luxuriously in the steam, sweating off the fat that he had accumulated in many years of eating in the best restaurants in Europe.

He had also seen Smith several times round six o'clock in the evening in the barber shop at the George V getting shaved, and after that in the bar upstairs, and in the bar at the Relais Plaza and the English bar downstairs at the Plaza-Athénée. And late at night he had seen him at various night clubs.

Barber thought unhappily of the last fifteen thousand francs in his wallet. It was going to be a long, wet, hard, expensive day. He put on his hat and coat and went out. It was still raining and he hailed a taxi and gave the driver the address of a restaurant near the Rond-Point.

It had started about two months before, in the stand at Auteuil just before the sixth race. The day was misty and there weren't many spectators, and Barber had not been doing very well, but he had got a tip on the sixth race, on an eight-to-one shot. He put five thousand down on the nose and climbed high up in the stand to get a good view of the race.

There was only one other spectator near him in the stand, a small, round man wearing an expensive-looking felt hat, and carrying a pair of binoculars and a rolled umbrella, like an Englishman. He smiled at Barber and nodded.

As Barber smiled back politely, he realized that he had seen the man many times before, or his brother, or half a dozen other men who looked like him, in restaurants and in bars and on the street, usually with tall girls who might have been lower-class mannequins or upper-class tarts.

The man with the umbrella moved over to him along the damp concrete row of seats. He had little, dapper feet and a bright necktie, and he had a well-cared-for, international kind of face, with large, pretty dark eyes, fringed by thick black lashes. He had what Barber had come to call an import-export face.

It was a face that was at the same time bland, cynical, self-assured, sensual, hopeless, and daring, and its owner might be Turkish or Hungarian or Greek or he might have been born in Basra. It was a face you might see in Paris or Rome or Brussels or Tangier, always in the best places, always doing business. It was a face, you felt somehow, that was occasionally of interest to the police.

"Good afternoon," the man said, in English, tipping his hat. "Are you having a lucky day?" He had an accent, but it was difficult to place. It was as if as a child he had gone to school everywhere and had had ten nurses of ten different nationalities.

"Not bad," Barber said carefully.

"Which do you like in this one?" The man pointed with his umbrella at the course, where the horses were gingerly going up to the distant starting-line on the muddied grass.

"Number Three," Barber said.

"Number Three." The man shrugged, as though he pitied

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Barber but was restrained by his good breeding from saying so. "How is the film business these days?" the man asked.

"The film business went home a month ago," Barber said, slightly surprised that the man knew anything about it. An American company had been making a picture about the war, and Barber had had four lucky, well-paid months as a technical expert, buckling leading men into parachutes and explaining the difference between a P-47 and a B-25 to the director.

"And the blonde star?" the man asked, taking his glasses away from his eyes. "With the exquisite behind?"

"Also home."

The man moved his eyebrows and shook his head gently, indicating his regret that his new acquaintance and the city of Paris were now deprived of the exquisite behind.

"Well," he said, "at least it leaves you free in the afternoon to come to the races." He peered out across the track through the glasses. "There they go."

No. 3 led all the way until the stretch. In the stretch, he was passed rapidly by four other horses.

"Every race in this country," Barber said as the horses crossed the finishing-line, "is a hundred metres too long." He took out his tickets and tore them once and dropped them on the wet concrete.

He watched with surprise as the man with the umbrella took out some tickets and tore them up, too. They were on No. 3, and Barber could see that they were big ones. The man dropped the tickets with a resigned, half-amused expression on his face, as though all his life he had been used to tearing up things that had suddenly become of no value.

"Are you staying for the last race?" the man with the umbrella asked as they started to descend through the empty stands.

"I don't think so," Barber said. "This day has been glorious enough already."

"Why don't you stay?" the man said. "I may have something."

Barber thought for a moment, listening to their footsteps on the concrete.

"I have a car," the man said. "I could give you a lift into town, Mr. Barber."

"Oh," Barber said, surprised, "you know my name."

"Of course," the man said, smiling. "Why don't you wait for me at the bar? I have to go and cash some tickets."

"I thought you lost," Barber said suspiciously.

"On Number Three," the man said. From another pocket he took out some more tickets and waved them gently. "But there is always the second-string," he said. "Will I see you at the bar?"

"O.K.," Barber said, not because he hoped for anything in the way of information on the next race from the man with the umbrella but because of the lift home. "I'll be there. Oh—by the way, what's your name?"

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" Smith," the man said. " Bert Smith."

Barber went to the bar and ordered a coffee, then changed it to a brandy, because coffee wasn't enough after a race like that. He stood there, hunched over the bar, reflecting sourly that he was one of the category of people who never think up a second string by way of insurance. Smith, he thought, Bert Smith. More insurance. On how many other names, Barber wondered, had the man lost before he picked that one?

Smith came to the bar softly, on his dapper feet, smiling, and laid a hand lightly on Barber's arm. " Mr. Barber," he said, " there is a rumour for the seventh race. Number Six."

" I never win on Number Six," Barber said.

" It is a lovely little rumour," Smith said. " At present, a twenty-two-to-one rumour."

Barber looked at the man doubtfully. He wondered briefly what there was in it for Smith. " What the hell," he said, moving towards the seller's window. " What have I got to lose? "

He put five thousand francs on No. 6 and superstitiously remained at the bar during the race, drinking brandy. No. 6 won, all out, by half a length, and, although the odds had dropped somewhat, paid eighteen to one.

Barber walked through the damp twilight, across the discarded newspapers and the scarred grass, with its farmlike smell, patting his inside pocket with the ninety thousand francs in a comforting bulge there, pleased with the little man trotting beside him.

Bert Smith had a Citroën, and he drove swiftly and well and objectionably, cutting in on other cars and swinging wide into the outside lane to gain advantage at lights.

" Do you often bet on the races, Mr. Barber? " he was saying as they passed a traffic policeman, forlorn in his white cape on the gleaming street.

" Too often," Barber said, enjoying the warmth of the car and the effects of the last brandy and the bulge in his pocket.

" You like to gamble? "

" Who doesn't? "

" There are many who do not like to gamble," Smith said, nearly scraping a lorry. " I pity them."

" Pity them? " Barber looked over at Smith, a little surprised at the word. " Why? "

" Because," Smith said softly, smiling, " in this age there comes a time when everyone finds that he is forced to gamble—and not only for money, and not only at the seller's window. And when that time comes, and you are not in the habit, and it does not amuse you, you are most likely to lose."

They rode in silence for a while. From time to time, Barber peered across at the soft, self-assured face above the wheel, lit by the dashboard glow. I would like to get a look at his passport, Barber thought—at all the passports he's carried for the last twenty years. " For example," Smith said, " during the war . . ."

" Yes? "

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"When you were in your plane," Smith said, "on a mission, weren't there times when you had to decide suddenly to try something, to depend on your luck for one split second, and if you hesitated, if you balked at the act of gambling—sssszt!" Smith took one hand from the wheel and made a gliding, falling motion, with his thumb down. He smiled across at Barber. "I suppose you are one of the young men who were nearly killed a dozen times," he said.

"I suppose so," Barber said.

"I prefer that in Americans," Smith said. "It makes them more like Europeans."

"How did you know I was in the war?" Barber said. For the first time, he began to wonder if it was only a coincidence that Smith had been near him in the stand before the sixth race.

Smith chuckled. "You have been in Paris how long?" he said. "A year and a half?"

"Sixteen months," Barber said, wondering how the man knew *that*.

"Nothing very mysterious about it," Smith said. "People talk at bars, at dinner parties. One girl tells another girl. Paris is a small city. Where shall I drop you?"

Barber looked through the window to see where they were. "Not far from here," he said. "My hotel is just off the avenue Victor-Hugo. You can't get in there with a car."

"Oh yes," Smith said, as though he knew about all hotels. "If it doesn't seem too inquisitive," he said, "do you intend to stay long in Europe?"

"It depends."

"On what?"

"On luck." Barber grinned.

"Did you have a good job in America?" Smith asked, keeping his eyes on the traffic ahead of him.

"In thirty years, working ten hours a day, I would have been the third biggest man in the company," Barber said.

Smith smiled. "Calamitous," he said. "Have you found more interesting things to do here?"

"Occasionally," Barber said, beginning to be conscious that he was being quizzed.

"After a war it is difficult to remain interested," Smith said. "While it is on, a war is absolutely boring. But then when it is over, you discover peace is even more boring. It is the worst result of wars. Do you still fly?"

"Once in a while."

Smith nodded. "Have you kept up your licence?"

"Yes."

"Yes, that's wise," Smith said.

He pulled the car sharply in to the kerb and stopped, and Barber got out. "Here you are," Smith said. He put out his hand, smiling, and Barber shook it. Smith's hand was softly fleshed, but there was a feeling of stone beneath it.

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" Thanks for everything," Barber said.

" Thank you, Mr. Barber, for your company," Smith said. He held Barber's hand for a moment, looking across the seat at him. " This has been very pleasant," he said. " I hope we can see each other again soon. Maybe we are lucky for each other."

" Sure," Barber said, grinning. " I'm always at home to people who can pick eighteen-to-one shots."

Smith smiled, relinquishing Barber's hand. " Maybe one of these days we'll have something even better than an eighteen-to-one shot," he said.

He gave a little wave and Barber closed the car door. Smith spurted out into the traffic, nearly causing two quatre chevaux to pile up behind him.

It had taken two weeks for Smith to declare himself. From the beginning, Barber had known that something was coming, but he had waited patiently, curious and amused, lunching with Smith in the fine restaurants Smith patronized, going to galleries with him and listening to Smith on the subject of the Impressionists, going out to the race courses with him and winning more often than not on the information Smith picked up from tight-lipped men around the paddocks.

Barber pretended to enjoy the little, clever man more than he actually did, and Smith, for his part, Barber knew, was pretending to like *him* more than he actually did. It was a kind of veiled and cynical wooing, in which neither party had yet committed himself. Only, unlike more ordinary wooings, Barber for the first two weeks was not sure in just which direction his desirability, as far as Smith was concerned, might lie.

Then, late one night, after a large dinner and a desultory tour of the night clubs, during which Smith had seemed unusually silent and abstracted, they were standing in front of Smith's hotel and he made his move. It was a cold night, and the street was deserted except for a prostitute with a dog, who looked at them without hope as she passed them on the way to the Champs-Elysées.

" Are you going to be in your hotel tomorrow morning, Lloyd? " Smith asked.

" Yes," Barber said. " Why? "

" Why? " Smith repeated absently, staring after the chilled-looking girl and her poodle walking despairingly down the empty, dark street. " Why? "

He chuckled irrelevantly. " I have something I would like to show you," he said.

" I'll be in all the morning," Barber said.

" Tell me, my friend," Smith said, touching Barber's sleeve lightly with his gloved hand, " have you any idea why I have been ringing you up so often for the last two weeks, and buying you so many good meals and so much good whisky? "

" Because I am charming and interesting and full of fun,"

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Barber said, grinning. "And because you want something from me."

Smith chuckled, louder this time, and caressed Barber's sleeve. "You are not absolutely stupid, my friend, are you?"

"Not absolutely," said Barber.

"Tell me, my friend," Smith said, almost in a whisper, "how would you like to make twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"What?" Barber asked, certain that he had not heard correctly.

"Sh-h-h," Smith said. He smiled, suddenly gay. "Think about it. I'll see you in the morning. Thank you for walking me home." He dropped Barber's arm and started into the hotel.

"Smith!" Barber called.

"Sh-h-h." Smith put his finger playfully to his mouth. "Sleep well. See you in the morning."

Barber watched him go through the glass revolving doors into the huge, brightly lit, empty lobby of the hotel. Barber took a step towards the doors to follow him in, then stopped and shrugged and put his collar up, and walked slowly in the direction of his own hotel. I've waited this long, he thought, I can wait till morning.

Barber was still in bed the next morning when the door opened and Smith came in. The room was dark, with the curtains drawn, and Barber was lying there, half asleep, thinking drowsily, Twenty-five thousand, twenty-five thousand. He opened his eyes when he heard the door open. There was a short, bulky silhouette framed in the doorway against the pallid light of the corridor.

"Who's that?" Barber asked, without sitting up.

"Lloyd, I'm sorry," Smith said. "Go back to sleep. I'll see you later."

Barber sat up abruptly. "Smith," he said. "Come in."

"I don't want to disturb—"

"Come in, come in." Barber got out of bed and, barefooted, went over to the window, and threw back the curtains. He looked out at the street. "Well, what do you know?" he said, shivering and closing the window. "The sun is shining. Shut the door."

Smith closed the door. He was wearing a loose grey tweed overcoat, very British, and a soft Italian felt hat, and he was carrying a large manila envelope. He looked newly bathed and shaved, and wide awake. Barber, blinking in the sudden sunshine, put on a robe and a pair of slippers and lit a cigarette.

"Excuse me," he said. "I want to wash." He went behind the screen that separated the wash-basin and the bidet from the rest of the room. As he washed, scrubbing his face and soaking his hair with cold water, he heard Smith go over to the window.

Feeling fresher and less at a disadvantage with his teeth brushed and his hair combed, Barber stepped out from behind the screen.

"Paris," Smith said, at the window, looking out. "What a satisfactory city. What a farce." He turned round, smiling. "Ah," he said, "how lucky you are. You can afford to put water on your head." He touched his thin, well-brushed hair sadly.

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" Every time I wash my hair, it falls like the leaves. How old did you say you are? "

" Thirty," Barber said, knowing that Smith remembered it.

" What an age." Smith sighed. " The wonderful moment of balance. Old enough to know what you want, still young enough to be ready for anything." He came back and sat down and propped the manila envelope on the floor next to the chair. " Anything." He looked up at Barber, almost coquettishly. " You recall our conversation, I trust," he said.

" I recall a man said something about twenty-five thousand dollars," Barber said.

" Ah—you do remember," Smith said gaily. " Well? "

" Well, what? "

" Well, do you want to make it? "

" I'm listening," Barber said.

Smith rubbed his soft hands together gently in front of his face, his fingers rigid, making a slight, dry, sliding sound.

" A little proposition has come up," he said. " An interesting little proposition."

" What do I have to do for my twenty-five thousand dollars? " Barber asked.

" What do you have to do for your twenty-five thousand dollars?" Smith repeated softly. " You have to do a little flying. You have flown for considerably less, from time to time, haven't you? " He chuckled.

" I sure have," Barber said. " What else do I have to do? "

" Nothing else," Smith said, sounding surprised. " Just fly. Are you still interested? "

" Go on," said Barber.

" A friend of mine has just bought a brand-new single-engine plane. A Larchcraft, single engine. A perfect, pleasant, comfortable, one-hundred-per-cent dependable aircraft," Smith said, describing the perfect little plane with pleasure in its newness and its dependability. " He himself does not fly, of course. He needs a private pilot, who will be on tap at all times."

" For how long? " Barber asked, watching Smith closely.

" For thirty days. Not more." Smith smiled up at him. " The pay is not bad, is it? "

" I can't tell yet," Barber said. " Go on. Where does he want to fly to? "

" He happens to be an Egyptian," Smith said, a little deprecatingly, as though being an Egyptian were a slight private misfortune, which one did not mention except among friends and then in lowered tones. " He is a wealthy Egyptian who likes to travel. Especially back and forth to France. To the South of France. He is in love with the South of France. He goes there at every opportunity."

" Yes? "

" He would like to make two round trips from Egypt to the vicinity of Cannes within the next month," Smith said, peering

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steadily at Barber, " in his new private plane. Then, on the third trip, he will find that he is in a hurry and he will take the commercial plane and his pilot will follow two days later, alone."

" Alone? " Barber asked, trying to keep all the facts straight.

" Alone, that is," Smith said, " except for a small box."

" Ah," Barber said, grinning. " Finally the small box."

" Finally." Smith smiled up at him delightedly. " It has already been calculated. The small box will weigh two hundred and fifty pounds. A comfortable margin of safety for this particular aircraft for each leg of the journey."

" And what will there be in the small two-hundred-and-fifty-pound box? " Barber asked, cool and relieved now that he saw what was being offered to him.

" Is it absolutely necessary to know? "

" What do I say to the customs people when they ask me what's in the box? " Barber said. " ' Go and ask Bert Smith? ' "

" You have nothing to do with customs people," Smith said. " I assure you. When you take off from the airport in Cairo, the box is not on board. And when you land at the airport at Cannes, the box is not on board. Isn't that enough? "

Barber took a last pull at his cigarette and doused it. He peered thoughtfully at Smith, sitting easily on the straight-backed chair in the rumpled room, looking too neat and too well dressed for such a place at such an hour. Drugs, Barber thought, and he can stuff them . . .

" No, Bertie boy," Barber said roughly. " It is not enough. Come on. Tell."

Smith sighed. " Are you interested up to now? "

" I am interested up to now," Barber said.

" All right," Smith said regretfully. " This is how it will be done. You will have established a pattern. You will have been in and out of the Cairo airport several times. Your papers always impeccable. They will know you. You will have become a part of the legitimate routine of the field. Then, on the trip when you will be taking off alone, everything will be perfectly legitimate. You will have only a small bag with you of your personal effects. Your flight plan will show that your destination is Cannes and that you will come down at Malta and Rome for refuelling only. You will take off from Cairo. You will go off course by only a few miles. Some distance from the coast, you will be over the desert. You will come down on an old R.A.F. landing-strip that hasn't been used since 1943. There will be several men there . . . Are you listening? "

" I'm listening." Barber had walked to the window and was standing there, looking out at the sunny street below, his back to Smith.

" They will put the box on board. The whole thing will not take more than ten minutes," Smith said. " At Malta, nobody will ask you anything, because you will be in transit and you will not leave the plane and you will stay only long enough to refuel. The

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same thing at Rome. You will arrive over the south coast of France in the evening, before the moon is up. Once more," Smith said, speaking as though he was savouring his words, "you will be just a little off course. You will fly low over the hills between Cannes and Grasse. At a certain point, you will see an arrangement of lights. You will throttle down, open the door, and push the box out from a height of a hundred feet. Then you will close the door and turn towards the sea, and land at the Cannes airport. Your papers will be perfectly in order. There will have been no deviations from your flight plan. You will have nothing to declare. You will walk away from the aeroplane once and for all, and we will pay you the twenty-five thousand dollars I have spoken of. Isn't it lovely?"

"Lovely," Barber said. "It's just a delicious little old plan, Bertie boy." He turned away from the window. "Now tell me what will be in that heavy little box."

Smith chuckled delightedly, as though what he was going to say was too funny to keep to himself. "Money," he said. "Just money."

"How much money?"

"Two hundred and fifty pounds of money," Smith said, his eyes crinkled with amusement. "Two hundred and fifty pounds of tightly packed English notes in a nice, strong, lightweight metal box. Five-pound notes."

At that moment, it occurred to Barber that he was speaking to a lunatic. But Smith was sitting there, matter-of-fact and healthy, obviously a man who had never for a moment in all his life had a single doubt about his sanity.

"When would I get paid?" Barber asked.

"When the box was delivered," Smith said.

"Bertie boy . . ." Barber shook his head reprovingly.

Smith chuckled. "I have warned myself that you were not stupid," he said. "All right. We will deposit twelve thousand five hundred dollars in your name in a Swiss bank before you start for the first time to Egypt."

"You trust me for that?"

Fleetingly the smile left Smith's face. "We'll trust you for that," he said. Then the smile reappeared. "And immediately after the delivery is made, we will deposit the rest. A lovely deal. Hard currency. No income tax. You will be a rich man. Semi-rich." He chuckled at his joke. "Just for a little plane ride. Just to help an Egyptian who is fond of the South of France and who is naturally a little disturbed by the insecurity of his own country."

"When shall I meet this Egyptian?" Barber asked.

"When you go to the airfield to take off for your first flight," Smith said. "He'll be there. Don't you worry. He'll be there. Are you hesitating about it?" he asked anxiously.

"I'm thinking," Barber said.

"It's not as though you were involved in your own country," Smith said piously. "I wouldn't ask a man to do that, a man who

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had fought for his country in the war. It isn't even as though it had anything to do with the English, for whom it is possible you have a certain affection. But the Egyptians . . ."

He shrugged and bent over and picked up the manila envelope and opened it. "I have all the maps here," he said, "if you would like to study them. The route is all marked out, but, of course, it would be finally in your hands, since it would be you who was doing the flying."

Barber took the thick packet of maps. He opened one at random. All it showed was the sea approaches to Malta and the location of the landing-strips there. Barber thought of twenty-five thousand dollars and the map shook a little in his hands.

"It is ridiculously easy," Smith said, watching Barber intently. "Foolproof."

Barber put the map down. "If it's so easy, what are you paying twenty-five thousand bucks for?" he said.

Smith laughed. "I admit," he said, "there may be certain little risks. It is improbable, but one never knows. We pay you for the improbability, if you want to put it that way." He shrugged. "After all, after a whole war you must be somewhat hardened to risks."

"When do you have to know?" Barber asked.

"Tonight," Smith said. "If you say no, naturally we have to make other plans. And my Egyptian friend is impatient."

"Who is we?" Barber asked.

"Naturally," Smith said, "I have certain colleagues."

"Who are they?"

Smith made a small regretful gesture. "I am terribly sorry," he said, "but I cannot tell you."

"I'll phone you tonight," said Barber.

"Good." Smith stood up and buttoned his coat and carefully put the soft Italian felt hat on his head, at a conservative angle. He played gently and appreciatively with the brim. "This afternoon, I shall be at the races. Maybe you would like to join me there?"

"Where're they running today?"

"Auteuil," Smith said. "Jumping today."

"Have you heard anything?"

"Perhaps," Smith said. "There is a mare who is doing the jumps for the first time. I have spoken to the jockey and I have been told the mare has responded in training, but I'll hear more at three o'clock."

"I'll be there."

"Good," Smith said enthusiastically. "Although it is against my interests, of course, to make you too rich in advance." He chuckled. "However, for the sake of friendship . . . Should I leave the maps?"

"Yes," said Barber.

"Until three o'clock," Smith said as Barber opened the door. They shook hands, and Smith went out into the corridor, a rich,

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tweedy, perfumed figure in the impoverished light of the pallid hotel lamps.

Barber locked the door behind him and picked up the packet of maps and spread them on the bed, over the rumpled sheets and blankets. He hadn't looked at aerial maps for a long time. Northern Egypt. The Mediterranean. The island of Malta. Sicily and the Italian coast. The Gulf of Genoa. The Alpes-Maritimes.

He stared at the maps. The Mediterranean looked very wide. He didn't like to fly over open water in a single-engined plane. In fact, he didn't like to fly. Since the war, he had flown as little as possible. He hadn't made any explanations to himself, but when he had had to travel, he had gone by car or train or boat whenever he could.

Twenty-five thousand dollars, he thought.

He folded the maps neatly and put them back into the envelope. At this point, the maps weren't going to help.

He lay down on the bed again, propped against the pillows, with his hands clasped behind his head. Open water, he thought. Five times. Even that wouldn't be too bad. But what about the Egyptians?

He had been in Cairo briefly during the war. He remembered that at night the policemen walked in pairs, carrying carbines. He didn't like places where the policemen carried carbines. And Egyptian prisons . . . He moved uneasily on the bed.

Who knew how many people were in on a scheme like this? And it would only take one to cook you. One dissatisfied servant or accomplice, one greedy or timid partner . . . He closed his eyes and almost saw the fat, dark uniformed men with their carbines walking up to the shiny, new little plane.

Or suppose you blew a tyre or crumpled a wheel on the landing-strip? Who knew what the strip was like, abandoned in the desert since 1943?

Twenty-five thousand dollars.

Or you would think you were making it. The box would be on the seat beside you and the coast of Egypt would be falling off behind you and the sea stretching blue below and ahead and the engine running like a watch—and then the first sign of the patrol. The shimmering dot growing . . . Coming up swiftly, going twice as fast as you, signalling you to turn around . . .

He lit a cigarette. Two hundred and fifty pounds. Say the box alone—it would have to be really solid—weighed a hundred and fifty pounds. How much did a five-pound note weigh? Would there be a thousand to a pound? Five thousand multiplied by a hundred, with the pound at two-eighty dollars. Close to a million and a half dollars.

His mouth felt dry, and he got up and drank two glasses of water. Then he made himself sit down on the chair, keeping his hands still. If there was an accident, if for any reason you failed to come through with it . . . If the money was lost, but you were saved. Smith didn't look like a murderer, although who knew what

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murderers looked like these days? And who knew what other people he was involved with? My colleagues, as Smith called them, who would then be your colleagues. The wealthy Egyptian, the several men at the old R.A.F. landing-strip in the desert, the people who were to set out the lights in the certain arrangement in the hills behind Cannes?

How many others, sliding across frontiers, going secretly and illegally from one country to another with guns and gold in their suitcases, the survivors of war, prison, denunciation? How many others whom you didn't know, whom you would see briefly in the glare of the African sun, as a running figure on a dark French hillside, whom you couldn't judge or assess and on whom your life depended, who were risking prison, deportation, police bullets for their share of a box full of money . . .?

He jumped up and put on his clothes and went out, locking the door. He didn't want to sit in the cold, disordered room, staring at the maps.

He walked around the city aimlessly for the rest of the morning, looking blindly into shop windows and thinking of the things he would buy if he had money. Turning away from a window, he saw a policeman watching him incuriously. Barber looked speculatively at the policeman, who was small, with a mean face and a thin moustache.

Looking at the policeman, Barber remembered some of the stories about what they did to suspects when they questioned them in the back rooms of the local prefectures. An American passport wouldn't do much good if they picked you up with thousands of English pounds under your arm.

This is the first time in my life, Barber thought curiously, walking slowly on the crowded street, that I have contemplated moving over to the other side of the law. He was surprised that he was considering it so calmly. He wondered why that was.

Perhaps the films and the newspapers, he thought. You get so familiar with crime, it becomes humanized and accessible. You don't think about it, but then, suddenly, when it enters your life, you realize that subconsciously you have been accepting the idea of crime as an accompaniment of everyday life. Policemen must know that, he thought, all at once seeing things from the other side. They must look at all the shut, ordinary faces going past them and they must know how close to theft, murder, and defaulting people are, and it must drive them crazy. They must want to arrest everybody.

While Barber was watching the horses move in their stiff-legged, trembling walk round the paddock before the sixth race, he felt a light tap on his shoulder.

"Bertie boy," he said, without turning around.

"I'm sorry I'm late," Smith said, coming up to the paddock rail beside Barber. "Were you afraid I wouldn't come?"

"What's the word from the jock?" Barber asked.

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Smith looked round him suspiciously. Then he smiled. "The jockey is confident," Smith said.

"Which one is it?"

"Number Five."

Barber looked at No. 5. It was a light-boned chestnut mare with a delicate, gentle head. Her tail and mane were plaited, and she walked alertly but not too nervously, well-mannered and with a glistening coat. Her jockey was a man of about forty, with a long, scooped French nose. He was an ugly man, and when he opened his mouth, you saw that most of his front teeth were missing. He wore a maroon cap, with his ears tucked in, and a white silk shirt dotted with maroon stars.

Barber, looking at him, thought, It's too bad such ugly men get to ride such beautiful animals.

"O.K., Bertie boy," he said. "Lead me to the window."

Barber bet ten thousand francs on the nose. The odds were a comfortable seven to one. Smith bet twenty-five thousand francs. They walked side by side to the stands and climbed up together as the horses came out on the track. The crowd was small and there were only a few other spectators as high up as that.

"Well, Lloyd?" Smith said, "did you look at the maps?"

"I looked at the maps," Barber said.

"What did you think?"

"They're very nice maps."

Smith looked at him sharply. Then he decided to chuckle. "You want to make me fish, eh?" he said. "You know what I mean. Did you decide?"

"I . . ." Barber began, staring down at the cantering horses. He took a deep breath. "I'll tell you after the race," he said.

"Lloyd!" The voice came from below, to the right, and Barber turned in that direction. Toiling up the steps was Jimmy Richardson. He had always been rather round and baby-plump, and Parisian food had done nothing to slim him down, and he was panting, his coat flapping open, disclosing a checked vest, as he hurried towards Barber.

"How are you?" he said breathlessly as he reached their level. He clapped Barber on the back. "I saw you up here and I thought maybe you had something for this race. I can't figure this one and they've been murdering me all day. I'm lousy on the jumps."

"Hullo, Jimmy," Barber said. "Mr. Richardson. Mr. Smith."

"Pleased to meet you," Richardson said. "How do you spell it?" He laughed loudly at his joke. "Say, really, Lloyd, do you know anything good? Maureen'll murder me if I go home and tell her I've not made a bean the whole afternoon."

Barber looked across at Smith, who was watching Richardson benignly. "Well," he said, "Bertie boy, here, thinks he heard something."

"Bertie boy," Richardson said, "please . . ."

Smith smiled thinly. "Number Five looks very good," he said. "But you'd better hurry. They're going to start in a minute."

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"Number Five," Richardson said. "Roger. I'll be right back." He went galloping down the steps, his coat flying behind him.

"He's a trusting soul, isn't he?" Smith said.

"He was an only child," Barber said, "and he never got over it."

Smith smiled politely. "Where do you know him from?"

"He was in my squadron."

"In your squadron." Smith nodded, looking after Richardson's hurrying, diminishing figure on the way to the seller's window. "Pilot?"

"Uh-huh."

"Good?"

Barber shrugged. "Better ones got killed and worse ones won every medal in the collection."

"What is he doing in Paris?"

"He works for a drug company," Barber said.

The bell rang and the horses raced towards the first jump.

"Your friend was too late, I'm afraid," Smith said, putting his binoculars to his eyes.

"Yep," Barber said, watching the bunched horses.

No. 5 fell on the fourth jump. She went over with two other horses, and suddenly she was down and rolling. The pack passed round her. The fourth jump was far off down the track, and it was hard to see what exactly was happening until, a moment later, the mare struggled to her feet and cantered after the pack, her reins broken and trailing.

Then Barber saw that the jockey was lying there motionless, crumpled up clumsily on his face, with his head turned in under his shoulder.

"We've lost our money," Smith said calmly. He took his binoculars from his eyes and pulled out his tickets and tore them and dropped them.

"May I have those, please?" Barber reached over for the binoculars. Smith lifted the strap over his head, and Barber trained the glasses on the distant jump where the jockey was lying. Two men were running out to him and turning him over.

Barber adjusted the binoculars, and the figures of the two men working on the motionless figure in the maroon-starred shirt came out of the blur into focus. Even in the glasses, there was something terribly urgent and despairing in the movements of the distant men. They picked the jockey up between them and started running clumsily off with him.

"Damn it!" It was Richardson, who had climbed up beside them again. "The window closed just as I—"

"Do not complain, Mr. Richardson," Smith said. "We fell at the fourth jump."

Richardson grinned. "It's the first bit of luck I've had all day."

Down below, in front of the stands, the riderless mare was swerving and trotting off down the track to avoid a groom who was trying to grab the torn reins.

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Barber kept the glasses on the two men who were carrying the jockey. Suddenly, they lowered him gently onto the grass, and one of the men bent down and put his ear against the white silk racing-shirt. After a while, he stood up. Then the two men started to carry the jockey again, only now they walked slowly, as though there was no sense in hurrying.

Barber gave the glasses back to Smith. "I'm going home," he said. "I've had enough of the sport for one day."

Smith glanced at him sharply. He put the glasses to his eyes and stared at the men carrying the jockey. Then he put the glasses into their case and hung the case by its strap over his shoulder.

"They kill at least one a year," he said in a low voice. "It is to be expected in a sport like this. I'll take you home."

"Say," Richardson said, "is that fellow dead?"

"He was getting too old," Smith said. "He kept at it too long."

"And I was sore," Richardson said, staring down the track, "because I came too late to bet on him. That was some tip." He made a babyish grimace. "A tip on a dead jock."

Barber started towards the exit.

"I'll come with you," Richardson said. "This isn't my lucky day."

The three men went down under the stands without speaking. People were hanging about in little groups, and there was a queer rising, hissing sound of whispering all over the place, now that the news was spreading.

When they reached the car, Barber got into the back, allowing Richardson to sit next to Smith, on the front seat. He wanted to be at least that much alone for the time being.

Smith drove slowly and in silence. Even Richardson spoke only once. "What a way to get it," he said as they drove between the bare, high trees. "In a lousy, three-hundred-thousand-franc race."

Barber sat in the corner, his eyes half closed, not looking out. He kept remembering the second time the two men had picked up the jockey. Smith's selection for the afternoon, Barber thought. He closed his eyes altogether and saw the maps spread out on the bed in his room. The Mediterranean. The wide reaches of open water. He remembered the smell of burning. The worst smell. The smell of your dreams during the war. The smell of hot metal, smouldering rubber. Smith's tip.

"Here we are," Smith was saying.

Barber opened his eyes. They had stopped at the corner of the cul-de-sac down which was the entrance to his hotel. He got out.

"Wait a minute, Bertie boy," Barber said. "I have something I want to give you."

Smith looked at him inquiringly. "Can't it wait, Lloyd?" he asked.

"No. I'll only be a minute." Barber went into his hotel and up to his room. The maps were folded in a pile on the bureau, except for one, which was lying open beside the others. The

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approaches to Malta. He folded it quickly and put all the maps into the manila envelope and went back to the car. Smith was standing beside the car, smoking, nervously clutching his hat, because a wind had come up and dead leaves were skittering along the pavement.

"Here you are, Bertie boy," Barber said, holding out the envelope.

Smith didn't take it. "You're sure you know what you're doing?" he said.

"I'm sure."

Smith still didn't take the maps. "I'm in no hurry," he said softly. "Why don't you hold on to them another day?"

"Thanks, no."

Smith looked at him silently for a moment. The fluorescent street lamps had just gone on, hard white-blue light, and Smith's smooth face looked powdery in the shadows under his expensive hat, and his pretty eyes were dark and flat under the curled lashes.

"Just because a jockey falls at a jump—" Smith began.

"Take them," Barber said, "or I'll throw them in the gutter."

Smith shrugged. He put out his hand and took the envelope. "You'll never have a chance like this again," he said, running his finger caressingly over the envelope edge.

"Good night, Jimmy," Barber leaned over the car and spoke to Richardson, who was sitting there watching them, puzzled. "Give my love to Maureen."

"Say, Lloyd," Richardson said, starting to get out, "I thought maybe we could have a couple of drinks. Maureen doesn't expect me home for another hour yet and I thought maybe we could—"

"Sorry," Barber said, because he wanted, more than anything else, to be alone. "I have a date. Some other time."

Smith turned and looked thoughtfully at Richardson. "I feel like a drink myself, Mr. Richardson. I would be honoured if you'd join me."

"Well," Richardson said uncertainly, "I live way down near the Hôtel de Ville and—"

"It's on my way," Smith said, smiling warmly.

Richardson settled back in his seat, and Smith started to get into the car. He stopped and looked up at Barber. "I made a mistake about you, didn't I, Lloyd?" he said contemptuously.

"Yes," Barber said. "I'm getting too old. I don't want to keep at it too long."

Smith chuckled and got into the car. They didn't shake hands. He slammed the door, and Barber watched him pull sharply away from the kerb, making a taxi-driver behind him jam on his brakes to avoid hitting him.

Barber watched the big black car weave swiftly down the street, under the hard white-blue lights. Then he went back to the hotel and up to his room and lay down, because an afternoon at the races always exhausted him.

An hour later, he got up. He splashed cold water on his face to

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wake himself, but even so he felt listless and empty. He wasn't hungry and he wasn't thirsty and he kept thinking about the dead jockey in his soiled silks. There was no one he wanted to see. He put on his coat and went out, hating the room as he closed the door behind him.

He walked slowly towards the Etoile. It was a raw night and a fog was moving in from the river, and the streets were almost empty, because everybody was inside having dinner. He passed several cinemas, neon in the drifting fog. On the films, he thought, the hero would have been on his way to Africa by now. He would nearly be caught several times in Egypt, and he would fight his way out of a trap on the desert, killing several dark men just in time on the airstrip. And he would develop engine trouble over the Mediterranean and just pull out, with the water lapping at the wingtips, and he would undoubtedly crash, without doing too much damage to himself, probably only a photogenic cut on the forehead, and would drag the box out in the nick of time. And he would turn out to be a Treasury agent or a member of British Intelligence and he would never doubt his luck and his nerve would never fail him and he would not end the picture with only a few thousand francs in his pocket.

Barber grinned bleakly, rehearsing the scenarios in front of the giant posters outside the cinemas. The films do it better, he thought. They have their adventures happen to adventurers. He turned off the Champs-Elysées, walking slowly and aimlessly, trying to decide whether to eat now or have a drink first. Almost automatically, he walked towards the Plaza-Athénée. In the two weeks that he had been wooed by Smith, they had met in the English bar of the Plaza-Athénée almost every evening.

He went into the hotel and downstairs to the English bar. As he came into the room, he saw, in the corner, Smith and Jimmy Richardson.

Barber smiled. Bertie boy, he thought, are you wasting your time! He stood at the bar and ordered a whisky.

"... Fifty missions," he heard Richardson say. Richardson had a loud, empty voice that carried anywhere. "Africa, Sicily, Italy, Yugo—"

Then Smith saw him. He nodded coolly, with no hint of invitation. Richardson swivelled in his chair then, too. He smiled uncomfortably at Barber, getting red in the face, like a man who has been caught by a friend with his friend's girl.

Barber waved to them. For a moment, he wondered if he ought to go over and sit down and try to get Richardson out of there. Barber watched Smith's face carefully. By now he knew Smith well enough to be able to tell a great deal of what was going on behind the pretty eyes and the pale face. Right now, Barber could tell that Smith was bored and that he wanted to get away from Jimmy Richardson.

Barber turned back to his drink, smiling to himself. It had taken Bertie boy just about an hour, he thought, an hour of looking

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at that good-natured empty face, an hour of listening to that booming, vacant voice, to decide that this was no man to fly a small box of five-pound notes from Cairo to Cannes.

Barber finished his drink quickly and went out of the bar before Smith and Richardson got up from the table. He had nothing to do for the evening, but he didn't want to get stuck with Jimmy and Maureen Richardson for dinner.

And now it was almost two months later and nobody had heard from Jimmy Richardson for thirty-two days.

In the whole afternoon of searching, Barber had not come upon any trace of Bert Smith. He had not been at the restaurants or the race course or the art galleries, the turkish baths, the bars. And no one had seen him for weeks.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Barber arrived at the English bar of the Plaza-Athénée. He was wet from walking in the day's rain, and tired, and his shoes were soggy and he felt a cold coming on. He looked around the room, but it was almost empty. Indulging himself, thinking unhappily of all the taxi fares he had paid that day, he ordered a whisky.

Barber sipped his whisky in the quiet room, thinking circularly, I should have said something. But what could I have said? And Jimmy wouldn't have listened. But I should have said something. *The omens are bad, Jimmy, go on home . . . I saw a plane crashing at the fourth jump, I saw a corpse being carried across dead grass by Egyptians, Jimmy, I saw silks and maps stained by blood.*

I had to be so damned superior, Barber thought bitterly. I had to be so damned sure that Jimmy Richardson was too stupid to be offered that much money. I had to be so damned sure that Bert Smith was too clever to hire him.

He remembered Jimmy's plane just off his wing over Sicily; he remembered Jimmy's face when he landed at Foggia with an engine on fire; he remembered Jimmy's voice singing drunkenly in a bar in Naples; he remembered Jimmy the day after he arrived in Paris, saying, " Kid, this is the town for me, I got Europe in my blood."

He finished his drink and paid and went upstairs slowly. He went into a phone booth and rang his hotel to see if there were any messages for him.

" Madame Richardson has been phoning you all day," the old man at the switchboard said. " Ever since four o'clock. She wanted you to ring her back."

" All right," Barber said. " Thank you." He started to hang up.

" Wait a minute, wait a minute," the old man said irritably. " She phoned an hour ago to say she was going out. She said that if you came in before nine o'clock, she would like you to join her at the bar of the Hotel Bellman."

" Thanks, Henri," Barber said. " If she happens to ring again, tell her I'm on my way." He went out of the hotel. The Bellman was nearby, and he walked towards it slowly, even though it was

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still raining. He was in no hurry to see Maureen Richardson . . .

When he reached the Bellman, he hesitated before going in, feeling too tired for this, wishing Maureen could be put off at least until the next day. He sighed, and pushed the door open.

The bar was a small one, but it was crowded with large, well-dressed men. Then he saw Maureen. She was sitting in a corner half turned away from the room, her shabby, thin coat thrown over her chair. She was sitting alone and there was a bottle of champagne in a bucket in a stand beside her.

Barber went over to her, irritated by the sight of the champagne. Is that what she's doing with my five thousand francs, he thought, annoyed. Women are going crazy, too, these days.

He leaned over and kissed the top of her head. She jumped nervously, then smiled when she saw who it was. " Oh Lloyd," she said, in a funny kind of whisper. She jumped up and kissed him, holding him hard against her. " Lloyd, Lloyd . . ." she said. She pushed him away a little, holding on to both his hands. Her eyes were smeary with tears and her mouth kept trembling.

" I came as soon as I got your message," Lloyd said, trying to sound practical, afraid Maureen was going to break down in front of all the people in the bar. She kept standing there, her mouth working, her hands gripping his avidly. He looked down, embarrassed, at her hands. There was an enormous ring glittering, white and blue, on her finger. It hadn't been there when she came to his hotel, and he knew he had never seen her with a ring like that before. He looked up, almost frightened, thinking, What the hell has she started? What has she got herself into?

Then he saw Jimmy. Jimmy was making his way among the tables towards him. He was smiling broadly and he had lost some weight and he was dark brown and he looked as though he had just come from a month's holiday on a southern beach.

" Hi, kid," Jimmy said, his voice booming across the bar-room murmur of conversation. " I was just phoning you again."

" He came home," Maureen said. " He came home at four o'clock this afternoon, Lloyd." She sank suddenly into her chair. Whatever else had happened that afternoon, it was plain that she had had access to a bottle. She sat in her chair, still holding on to one of Barber's hands, looking up, with a shimmering, half-dazed expression on her face, at her husband.

Jimmy clapped Barber on the back and shook hands fiercely. " Lloyd," he said. " Good old Lloyd. Garçon! " he shouted, his voice reverberating through the whole room. " Another glass. Take your coat off. Sit down. Sit down."

Lloyd took his coat off and sat down slowly. " Welcome home," he said quietly. He blew his nose. The cold had arrived.

" First," Jimmy said, " I have something for you." Ceremoniously he dug his hand into his pocket and brought out a roll of ten-thousand-franc notes, three inches thick. He took off one of the notes. " Maureen told me," he said seriously. " You were a damn good friend, Lloyd. Have you got change for ten? "

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"I don't think so," Barber said. "No."

"Garçon," Jimmy said to the waiter, who was putting down a third glass, "get me two fives for this, please." When he spoke French, Jimmy had an accent that made even Americans wince.

Jimmy filled the three glasses carefully. He lifted his glass and clinked it first against Barber's and then against Maureen's. Maureen kept looking at him as though she had just seen him for the first time and never hoped to see anything as wonderful again.

"To crime," Jimmy said. He winked. He made a complicated face when he winked, like a baby who has trouble with a movement of such subtlety and has to use the whole side of its face and its forehead to effect it. Maureen giggled.

They drank. It was very good champagne.

"You're having dinner with us," Jimmy said. "Just the three of us. The victory dinner. Just Beauty and me and you, because if it hadn't been for you . . ." Suddenly solemn, he put his hand on Barber's shoulder.

"Yes," said Barber. His feet were icy and his trousers hung soddenly around his wet socks and he had to blow his nose again.

"Did Beauty show you her ring?" Jimmy asked.

"Yes," Barber said.

"She's only had it since six o'clock," Jimmy said. Maureen held her hand up and stared at her ring. She giggled again.

"I know a place," Jimmy said, "where you can get pheasant and the best bottle of wine in Paris and . . ."

The waiter came back and gave Jimmy the two five-thousand-franc notes. Dimly, Barber wondered how much they weighed.

"If ever you're in a hole," Jimmy said, giving him one of the notes, "you know where to come, don't you?"

"Yes," Barber said. He put the note in his pocket.

He started to sneeze then, and ten minutes later he said he was sorry but he didn't think he could last the evening with a cold like that. He finished a second glass of champagne, and said he'd keep in touch, and went out of the bar, feeling his toes squish in his wet shoes. He was hungry and he was very fond of pheasant and actually the cold wasn't so bad, even if his nose kept running all the time. But he knew he couldn't bear to sit between Maureen and Jimmy Richardson all night and watch the way they kept looking at each other.

He walked back to his hotel, because he was through with taxis, and went up and sat on the edge of his bed in his room, in the dark, without taking his coat off. I better get out of here, he thought, rubbing the wet off the end of his nose with the back of his hand. This continent is not for me.

★ ***Sparkling as a Christmas tree, rich as rum butter, Michael Gilbert's best-ever Sergeant Petrella story, "Deep and Crisp and Even," appears in next month's Argosy on sale December 10***

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HUNT THE PEACOCK

Great swipes of brilliant colour
—enough to bedazzle us all

BY H. A. MANHOOD

THE trout were taking only mayflies that day, gulping them greedily as they squirmed free of the pod and spread their crumpled young-green wings. Not one floated long enough for the wings to harden for flight to the shore.

We tried dapping with artificial flies but the trout knew better. Hungry by now, needing fish to fry as a change from eggs and salt, fat bacon, we—the Gold-crock twins from O'Connell Street and I—searched the lonely shore of the lough and the higher dry-stone walls too for black-winged drakes surviving from yesterday's hatch. But the birds had been as thorough as the trout.

All we found, surprisingly, tucked among the slabs of a collapsed section of wall, was a silk-wrapped, angular parcel. The silk was a nightgown, lace-trimmed and beribboned, beautiful as cloud. The angular shapes were painted canvases, fifteen inches by twelve, six in all, all painted in the same bad-dream manner, brilliant as exploding fruit. Strange fish, fowl, and humans swam, flew, and trod bravely in a sword-whipped maze of colour.

The twins stared like birds at an impossible worm. Leo covered his eyes with his hands, moaning comically. "'Twas right to wrap them well with so much colour running wild," he said. "But why?"

Lenny clucked at such heavy judgment, studying the paintings from all angles: "They've got something, a sort of eagerness . . ."

"Like a running cow!" Leo said acidly, but Lenny only smiled a creamy smile and said to remember that heaven was wide and profit in everything and didn't all their cinema halls need redecorating and hard-hitting colour part of the business?

The twins are nice, lively lads, showmen by nature but capable of a rare, sniffing dignity of manner and purpose. They owned, with their mother, one large plushy cinema and innumerable ratty halls all over the Free State where films were shown perhaps twice a week with auctions and meetings held between, the whole

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lot known in the trade as the Gold-crock circuit. With sound reason, too, for once when excavating rubbish from a newly acquired derelict building they'd actually found some battered crocks of solid gold, age unknown but the gold of the choicest. They deserved the luck and had made good use of it.

In appearance they were identical enough to confuse, tall and thinly elegant in London-made clothes, apt to be mistaken for lawyers on holiday or prospecting horse-trainers if they were wearing pepper-and-salt, good-looking in a gaunt, in-need-of-mothering way, with cresty, brindled hair and charm enough to move a judge; single still, the pair of them, but not for want of looking.

Wanting the hire of a car, I had asked them to name the best garage in Dublin. " To Galway and the coast for a bit of fishing and the view? "

Leo looked at Lenny and they grinned in delighted agreement. " Well now, it's a few months since we crossed the land ourselves and no harm in examining a bit of the circuit unexpectedly. Would you consider travelling with us as guest and the schedule practically yours? "

It was a grand offer and great travelling too, with them knowing all the hotels and fully half the population. The vehicle was a large Rolls-Royce, old but splendid still, with cut-glass vases for flowers, elaborate foot-warmers, speaking-tubes looped like pensive snakes, and bearskin rugs. It was like travelling in a bit of palace, and with such luxurious cover handy we went easy on the hotels, sleeping out often, cooking for ourselves, camping by the fishing when it was good, drinking whisky neat whenever we mistrusted the water, playing poker and listening to operatic records on a portable gramophone in the spacious back of the car when it rained, feeling like contented birds in a gilded cage whenever a patched and whiskered native peered dubiously in.

We ourselves shaved hardly at all, but now, with the fishing gone bad on us and a problem sitting like a hungry pup, Leo felt the need. " Curiosity is burning an indecent hole," he said plaintively. " The paintings I could ignore but I should like to see the shape that went into the silk, or at least know a reason why."

He handled the nightgown lovingly, looking for signs of wear, astonished to find it sweet and sound, holding it against himself for size, pleased to imagine that its owner was near right for him, folding it with the care of a young detective cherishing his first Exhibit A, wrapping it in our only fishery map and storing it under a seat, Lenny observing it all with tranquil understanding.

We shaved briskly, tilting the driving-mirrors to suit, watched

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by a cormorant standing with outstretched wings on a rock like a cross on a drowned church. We packed rods, pots and pans, and a spare sack of turf in the back of the car.

Leo would have left the paintings propped against a rock for gulls and rabbits to ponder over but Lenny said they must have been forgotten and be of value to the owner and they'd be a means of introduction anyway to the shape Leo had so strongly in mind. They might even have been painted by someone already famous for hadn't art the strangest possibilities? Besides, they might contrive to employ the painter to brighten a few of their peeling backwoody cinemas.

Leo nodded agreement. "O'Malley at the cross-roads will know who it is. He knows everything except how to stop his wife talking."

O'Malley did know, too. He greeted us most kindly with free drink and, in apology for delaying his serving of groceries to a beshawled old woman, gave her one, too. Lenny showed him a painting, explaining the finding.

"Ah yes, indeed, the foreigners with the peacock car. Good customers but crazy and difficult to understand, y'know. French, husband and wife, I guess . . ."

"Don't you be so sure, you old fool! Together they were but were you at the wedding?" This was screamed from the backhouse and O'Malley's wife regretting that she could not enter the shop to inform us fully because food was on the boil.

"I'm sorry I was at yours," O'Malley muttered. "You'd think the woman was a cook by her talk. Take no notice. The foreigners camped down below for a week. They've a powerful kind of motor van all equipped inside and it painted like a prize peacock, great swipes of strong colour all over. It's the man who paints—motor-cars or pictures, it seems all one. I was near asking him to do over the lintel but I was afraid he'd overdo it and bedazzle us all."

"Whatever he did it would have been better than it is now!" Pans crashed in the backhouse and a dog bolted between us, red, stolen meat between its teeth. O'Malley took not the slightest notice. He poured more drink, waving away Lenny's offer of money, drawing female curves in the slop on the counter.

"And she, what was she like?" Leo's voice was softly urgent, hardly meant to include us, but even so the woman outside heard.

Like flying splinters the words came: "Paint and waggle, that's her! Red on the face and hands, and trousers down below, and the flying Fathers asleep to be sanctioning the like!"

"Not always trousers, and anyway they suited her shape and

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the scrambling life, which is more than can be said for some," O'Malley said mildly. "A fine sweet woman be the name of Nora, just like one of us, with none of our talk but a gift of explaining with her hands what she wanted and a smile for thanks rich as double egg. You thought of catching up and returning the work?"

"We did."

"That's kindness itself, I'd say, and I wish I could be riding with you. They took the Boir Bobgurnach road because it turns to the sea and they with a taste for it. They would be stopping often for him to paint as the fancy comes so you'll catch them easy. I'll be waiting to hear the way it went next time you pass. So long, now."

O'Malley watched us go, brusque with regret for many things. Leo, surprisingly, was sad for him but not Lenny. "Didn't he marry for the money and no luck in that anyway? Come on now else misery'll have us all."

And with that we were away, Lenny and I in the front of the car, Lenny driving fast but prepared for the occasional ass sprawled in the stony road or the sheep that bounced across like loose-linked beads. Alone in the back, Leo sat limply, blank-eyed, unlit cigarette in hand, lost in dimpled daydream.

It was a lonely road, looping like frayed, lost string between craggy slopes. We asked the few we met for news of the peacock car; all knew of it, several had seen it, and our direction was undeniably right. Stopping for food in a half-awake village, we asked again of a bearded butcher. He eyed us suspiciously until we explained our friendly purpose, then threw a dozen lambs' kidneys in with the rest of our purchase as a kind of apology.

"I didn't want to inform against them, if you understand me. The woman bought meat sliced extra thin against the grain and she drew a lot of pictures asking if they could camp by the ruined castle in the Boonadoon domain. No harm at all, I told her, and the man said a strange hullo to our youngest and gave her a picture book and a handful of pence because her eyes were blue and the teeth all there as the woman explained."

So, without delay, we took our meat to the ruined castle. But the peacock car was not there. We could see where it had stood for a while and lit our fire on the ashes of an old one, frying the meat, making coffee, toasting bread and cheese, relaxing in the sun, Lenny and I very inclined to delay the hunt in favour of fishing.

We pointed out the nearness of a promising lake to the unwilling Leo but he stamped mutteringly away from us into the ruins, kicking at flowerheads, even hurling stones at the jackdaws in

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his exasperation. We must have slept then, deeply and comfortably on deep, sweet herbage, waking shakily to a resounding shout from the absent Leo. Thinking maybe he'd broken a leg, we went irritably among the tumbled, mossy stones of the castle and there was Leo, intact, dancing excitedly, pointing at a still-solid wall.

Hung upon the wall, neatly as in a gallery, were five more paintings, among them a vaguely recognizable one of the butcher's daughter, blue-eyed and white-toothed, standing angelically in the doorway of a house built entirely of hearts, kidneys, and sausages.

Lenny and I stared perplexedly at each other. Leo collected the paintings and trotted away with them to the car.

"Damned peculiar business," Lenny said. "Doesn't make sense. No peace of mind till we find out, I suppose. We could use a fast worker for the redecoration anyway. The quicker we find out the quicker we can get back to fishing, though where we go from here I don't know."

Leo knew, though. He'd discovered a small, spying boy hiding like a toad among stones, had softened resistance with a couple of cigarettes and a match or two, and found out the new direction. They'd taken the old bog road to the sea only a day ago and no escaping us if we hurried. So we took the bog road, too, asking once more of an old man who was struggling to lever a cow-sized rock from the middle of his potato plot.

Sure, he'd seen them right enough; they'd camped the night over in the middle of the bog, the motor bright like a big dead parrot among the old brown and glint of water. We helped him lift and prop the stone so that he could build a splitting fire under and he gave us an egg each for our trouble, wishing us immortal luck as we drove on.

The camp-fire was still glowing when we came to it and no need to stop for there was only one way to go and no time for more paintings. But Leo, obstinate now and anxious for clues, said we should. More detective-like than ever, he looked among the tented turf by the roadside, returning triumphantly with what could only be one more canvas, wrapped not in the silk he had wished for but in a winding sheet of toilet paper.

Impatiently, hoping perhaps for a likeness of the woman, he unwound the paper, letting it blow free in the wind. But the painting was an unhappy one of many similar whitewashed cabins with many similar old men trying vainly to lever great goblin-faced stones heavenwards. Disappointedly Leo stacked it with the rest and we went on across the bog, with the blown yards of flimsy paper looped among the turf cuttings behind us like a spill

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of milk from one of the ripe, rounded clouds dawdling overhead.

We caught up with the foreigners soon after, on the edge of a cliff, with gulls screaming petulantly over and the elephant thump of the sea faint below. The motor van was indeed peacock-bright, a quick gulp of circus in itself.

The man was painting absorbedly on the extreme edge of the cliff and the woman, O'Malley's darling Nora, was preparing food on the back flap of the van, not trousered but lightly skirted so that brown legs were ours to see and the well-kept feet a delight too after so many deformed and scaly Irish ones.

She was beautiful, no doubt about it, middle height, well shaped even by Leo's high standards, with a black toss of hair, a face sad in repose but gay as breaking bud when the laugh came, wide-eyed, full-lipped, with a delicately determined chin and no restraint anywhere. She laughed as we came and I suppose we did look funny, burdened with the paintings and over-anxious to become acquainted.

I explained, slowly and carefully, how glad we were to be able to return the paintings, and the possibility of employ on the faded cinemas. She really laughed then, calling across to the man between splutterings, leaning against the van for support.

Next she did an extraordinary thing. One by one she picked up the paintings and scaled them over the edge of the cliff. Shrugging expressively, she reached into the van and brought out cognac and glasses; a drink would be most necessary inside us when we heard. She hardly knew how to begin. She looked at each of us in turn, taking most time over Leo.

It was splendid of us to take so much trouble but the fact was that her husband was a millionaire and himself owned cinemas. His father and his grandfather had been millionaires so he knew the condition well. He had done everything possible to amuse himself between attacks of business but the painting satisfied him best. He didn't like or want the paintings, he just liked doing them. Naturally they had to be got rid of because they piled up alarmingly. See now, he has just finished another and is starting on one more.

We hadn't anything to say but gulped the cognac and asked unblushingly for more. Leo looked both bewildered and fierce, tempted, it was plain to see, to push the painting husband over the cliff and claim Nora for himself.

Aware of strong feeling and embarrassment, Nora showed us the van. Marcel had designed the fittings, the folding beds, the water tanks, the stove, the racks for the wine, the hams, cheeses, sausages, and the vegetables and fruit. They had travelled to many parts of the world in it and it was a very beneficial way of

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spending time. The motor was a special model and could climb mountains like a fast cat. Ah, here was Marcel himself.

Marcel looked like a working house-painter in his peaked cap and paint-smudged linen trousers. He also looked strong enough to push a house over as well as paint it. Smilingly he handed Nora one more painting, shook hands politely with us, and went to examine the Rolls. Nora looked at the painting, hesitated, then gave it to Leo. I looked over his shoulder.

Floating on a sea of thick-lipped, brindled waves was my old tweed hat with brilliant flowers and a lighthouse tufting from it, in the same fierce style of painting as all the others. But, in a corner, gazing happily out, was a lovely, truthful miniature of Nora, extraordinarily delicate in line and colour.

"You see how it is?" Nora explained through me to Leo. "He loves me. I love him. Sometimes he paints the face, sometimes a leg or a finger, but always like that, clear and certain. The other painting is a kind of game but these little bits he paints without laughing, if you see what I mean. Yes, you may keep it for he will paint some more, tomorrow, next week, always I hope he will paint the little bits of me between the others. You see?"

We did see. Leo was most grateful for the painting but looking at Nora was not good for him. Resolutely he shut himself in the back of the car and Lenny, recognizing the condition, said thank heaven we've cleared that up and now for some fishing. We shook hands all round, all except Leo, and Lenny turned the car, stopping questioningly. Had we suitable tackle for a boat trip offshore after the pollack or should we turn inland for trout?

As I searched through tackle-boxes for the necessary hooks I saw Nora running towards us. She was carrying a bottle. From Marcel himself with a thank-you for so much trouble, she said. Very old and no deception because it was from the cellar of his own much-respected château. And, by the way—she came whispering close—if I could remember to mention it somewhat later, she had an unclaimed sister and there was an address on the label and wasn't it a good idea for cinema proprietors to travel and make notes for improvement?

She laughed as she said it, twiddled her fingers at Leo, staring mournfully through the back window, and ran to the peacock-painted Citroën, fighting Marcel for control of a frying-pan, waving the pan triumphantly as we drove away.

★ ★ ★

SEPTEMBER COMPETITION

First prize of two guineas in our Order of Preference Competition goes to Giles Gordon, Greenhill Gardens, Edinburgh.

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A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

COUNTER ATTACK

" I've been watching this girl," said the store detective

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

" AND now, ladies and gemmen," announced the manager, " we are glad to welcome the first of our guest artistes. Give the little lady a big hand, if you please."

In common with the rest of the audience, Petrella had really come to the cinema to see Gloria Torino in *Thunder over Naples*. However, he settled himself in his seat and hoped that the talent-spotting contest was not going to take too long. If he was out in time he planned to consummate his free evening with a pint at the Running Horse, where there was always good company to be found towards closing-time.

The talent of Highside ran to six turns. A small girl, who did tap-dancing. A ballad singer. A foreign gentleman in a shiny blue suit, who told some shiny blue stories; a thin gentleman who played the mouth-organ and had trouble with his teeth; and a stout gentleman who impersonated a comedian impersonating an alderman.

The sixth was subtly different. When the turn was called, Petrella was aware of a very faint stirring of anticipation among the audience. There was a slight but calculated pause after the announcement, and then a ten-year-old boy walked out onto the stage. He was carrying a violin. And, by a stroke of imaginative showmanship, was dressed, not in the typical silk shirt and bow tie of the infant prodigy, but in an ordinary rather shabby grey flannel suit. Without the least fuss or preamble he started to play.

Petrella was not musician enough to know whether it was a great performance. It was certainly a very satisfying one. He joined heartily in the applause, which brought the manager on again to say that he judged that the verdict of the audience was in favour of the final performer (renewed applause) and he would

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therefore have great pleasure in handing him a cheque for twenty-five pounds, and two free vouchers for the next month at the cinema. One for himself and one for his girl-friend. (Laughter.)

The boy smiled coldly and without embarrassment, the lights dimmed, and the big film began.

That was destined to be a memorable evening. At ten o'clock Petrella was in the private bar at the back of the Running Horse talking to "Square" Peggs, proprietor of the all-night café in Exover Street, and Solly Moss the bookmaker when, from the Saloon Bar arose the sound of a song. A powerful tenor voice, its high notes inspired by passion, its low notes enriched by alcohol, was embarking on Verdi's *La Donna è Mobile.*

"Get a earful of that," said Solly. "Grand opera."

"Who is it?" asked Petrella. Leaning across the service counter, he could see over into the Saloon Bar, but the drinkers masked the singer.

"Mario," said Peggs, who knows everyone. "An Eye-tye. Used to be on the stage. Not bad, is he?"

"Very nice," said Petrella.

"Free, too," said Solly. "Tumtitty-tum-tum; tumtitty-tum-tum. And a basin of Irish stew."

"That can't be right," said Peggs. "It's an Italian song. Irish stew!"

"That's what it sounds like to me," said Solly. "'Ullo. Whassis?"

The crowd at the bar swirled apart for a moment and they had a spasmodic view of what followed, as on a very old and badly patched cinema film, blank stretches alternating with bursts of wildly exciting action.

In the open door stood a thick, red-faced man, carrying in his hand what looked like a meat-axe. Mario had his head back on a sustained high note, which died as he spotted the newcomer.

"What—?" said Petrella.

The scene dissolved, and reopened. The red-faced man was now chasing Mario round the piano. The crowd was encouraging both sides. The red-faced man seemed to be gaining.

What happened next was not entirely clear. Petrella got the impression that a beautiful, black-haired girl, seated at the ringside, stuck out a shapely leg. Certainly the red-faced man tripped, and fell on his face. Mario jumped for the door, which someone obligingly opened and then slammed behind him. Petrella did not wait for the next reel. He was already in the street, moving fast.

The chase lasted a bare fifty yards. Mario was already in bad

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shape when he started. Petrella was fresh. The singer stood at bay under a street lamp.

"Now what's it all about?" said Petrella.

"Who are you?"

"I'm a detective sergeant. Off duty. And hoping to stay that way."

"You are a policeman? Good. And you witnessed the assault."

"I saw a man chasing you round the piano. What's it all about?"

Mario started to say something, but seemed to change his mind. "He was drunk," he said. "I do not know him."

"He seemed to know you," said Petrella.

He became aware that they were not alone. The black-haired girl had joined them.

Looking at her again, in the light of the lamp, Petrella realized that she was beautiful. It was a Mediterranean beauty, a beauty of black hair and smooth white face and assured feminine bearing. She was cheaply dressed, but outshone her clothes with a grace that stultified mink and diamonds. She was Gloria Torino, translated to North London.

"It's quite all right," she said. "He's knocked himself out. He hit his head on a table." Her voice was soft and, thought Petrella, as distinctive as its owner.

"Splendid," said Mario. "Then we can all go home, yes?"

"Who is this gentleman, Daddy?"

"We haven't been formally introduced yet."

"My name's Petrella."

"Padulo. Mario Padulo. My daughter, Francesca."

"Why," said Petrella, "was that man chasing you?"

"There is much enmity against us," said Mario. His voice was mournful. His eyes, in the light of the street lamps were brown pools of sadness. "We are newcomers. People envy us our talents—our little successes."

The girl put one hand on his arm.

"Is it my fault if I am an uncommon man—have uncommon children? But common people resent. I am sure you are not common yourself, Mr. Petrella, so you will understand. Thank you. Good night."

The girl turned her full and warming smile on him for a moment. Then they were both gone.

Petrella went home to bed. His dreams were of black hair, brown eyes, and a classic nose.

In the days that followed he found himself thinking a lot about the Padulos. He even made one or two visits to the

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Running Horse in the hope that Mario or his daughter might reappear. And he made what he hoped were discreet inquiries.

"Dunno a lot about him," said Mr. Peggs. "He lives down Carrington Street, him and his family. Used to be in opera, he says. He's certainly got a voice. He's a bit of a snake, too."

"Snake?"

"Women. You know what they're like with foreigners. Singers, too."

Petrella nodded wisely. In fact he knew very little about women.

"There was talk of him and Effie Rampole—you know Effie?"

Petrella thought hard. He seemed to remember Effie Rampole as a faded blonde with an obtrusive figure. Her husband was a foreman butcher in Smithfield Market. A big red-faced man. That was it, of course! The scene in the pub suddenly made sense.

"Do you know the family?"

"I've met all three," said Peggs. "The eldest girl's a bit of a fizzer. But you want to watch out for her—"

"What do you mean?" said Petrella. He had meant to say it casually, but it came out of him like a rap from cross-examining Counsel.

"I just hear things," said Peggs.

"You don't want to believe all you hear," said Petrella crossly.

"That's right, you don't," said Peggs. When Petrella had gone he mixed himself a digestive draught and winked heavily into the glass before he swallowed it.

Mrs. Marsham was the store detective at Carleton's, the big multiple store at North End. She was a large, grey-haired woman, with a face like an Egyptian Queen Mother; and she very rarely made mistakes.

She had had her eye for some time on the pretty, black-haired girl with the red shopping-bag, who was standing, in apparent thought, near the cosmetics counter. It was the lunch-hour rush, the worst moment of the day. The store was full of a jostling, swaying crowd. Mrs. Marsham closed steadily on her prey. She saw a hand move. Something was picked up. Something was not replaced. "I reckon she's got about a dozen of those special lipsticks," thought Mrs. Marsham. "Five shillings each. Time to step in."

She fought her way out through the crowd. The girl turned her head as she caught her up. She seemed to sense that something was happening.

"Would you mind stepping along to the Supervisor's office?"

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How many hundred times had she said it? And the result was nearly always the same. The flare of indignation. Uneasy indignation. Bluster. Finally, capitulation. From the experienced ones, sullen acquiescence. From the beginners, tears.

This girl simply turned her head, and said, "What?"

Mrs. Marsham repeated her request.

"Why?" said the girl. "Who are you?"

Mrs. Marsham introduced herself.

"I suppose that gives you the right to order me about," said the girl. "Come on, then."

They reached the little cubicled partition that Mr. Leslie, the supervisor, called his office. "I have been watching this girl," said Mrs. Marsham, "and have reason to believe that she may have been taking goods without paying for them."

"What!" The girl stared.

If acting, thought Mrs. Marsham, it was good acting. Exactly the right proportions of surprise and indignation.

Mr. Leslie said, "There's an easy way of settling this, isn't there? Perhaps you wouldn't mind opening your bag."

It was a distinctive, scarlet plastic shopping-bag, with a slide-fastener across the top.

"Have I got to?" said the girl. "Is that the law?"

Mr. Leslie hesitated. He mistrusted people who talked about the law.

"No," he said shortly. "But if you won't, sooner or later we shall have to send for a policeman."

"Send for him now," said the girl. Mr. Leslie signalled to Mrs. Marsham, who left quickly. They had no right to detain the girl. If she wanted to walk out, she could. And the bag might disappear. There was usually a policeman on duty at the cross-roads. Today he wasn't in sight. But Mrs. Marsham spotted a plain-clothes detective sergeant whom she knew. "A little trouble," she said. "Could you come in?"

Petrella followed her into the store. The crowd was still thick. Mrs. Marsham pushed ruthlessly through. Petrella trod on the toe of a fair-haired freckled girl carrying a red shopping-bag, apologized hastily, and plunged after his guide.

Thus did he meet Francesca for the second time. Neither of them gave any indication that they knew each other. The girl said, in the same expressionless voice, "Are you a policeman?"

"A detective sergeant." He felt for his warrant card.

The girl said, "I believe you, you look like a policeman." She was already unfastening her bag. Now she tilted it up onto the table. A package of paper handkerchiefs slid out; a sales slip was tucked into the corner. Then a carton of biscuits. Not, as Mr.

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Leslie saw, of a sort stocked by Carleton's Stores. And a purse. The girl opened the purse and turned it upside-down. A single florin rolled from it and fell quietly onto the carpet. It made no more noise than a child's tear.

Petrella stooped and picked it up. The silence in the room was complete. Mr. Leslie was looking angry and uneasy. Mrs. Marsham's face was a dusky, mottled red.

"Would you like to search my clothes too?" said the girl.

Mrs. Marsham shook her head. "I'm satisfied that she concealed nothing about her person," she said.

"Nor in her bag, it would seem," said Petrella, dryly.

The awkward silence continued. The next move was clearly with the accusers. "I'm very sorry that this should have happened," said Mr. Leslie.

"I don't mind about you," said the girl. "I want this woman to apologize."

There was a violent pause. Then, "I'm sorry," said Mrs. Marsham, grittily. "Evidently I made a mistake." It was like a recantation screwed from a Protestant by the Inquisition.

"That's all right, then," said the girl.

When she had gone Petrella said, "I think you might have been a bit pleasanter. Nine girls out of ten would have made trouble for you."

Mrs. Marsham had recovered.

"The reason she didn't make trouble," she said sourly, "is that she's a professional shop-lifter. I'd stake my reputation on it."

"Then you'd lose your reputation," said Petrella, so savagely that they both stared at him.

That night, as he was turning into the road where he lived, a figure moved in the shadows. Petrella whirled about, and then stopped.

"I didn't mean to startle you," said a gentle voice.

"It's you, is it?"

"I just wanted to say thank you."

"There's no need," said Petrella. He was suddenly breathless. He had been thinking about her all day. "It is you who ought to be thanked. A lot of girls would have made a fuss."

"I never make a fuss," said Francesca. "Good night."

That was the third time.

On the next occasion, Francesca did not even know that Petrella had seen her. He was hanging about, inconspicuously, outside Bellboy's, the big Chemist and Fancy Goods Store, and happened to have his eye on the door, when it opened in a hurry

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and a fair-haired, freckled girl came out. Petrella recognized her; but he had to think for a moment before he placed her. Then he was aware of a horrible, sinking sensation. A feeling almost of nightmare. The sort of nightmare in which the impossible became probable and you met yourself coming round the corner.

It became vitally necessary to be in two places at once. He had to follow the fair-haired girl who had just come out, and he had to go into the shop and find out if what he feared to be the truth was so indeed.

He became aware that a redheaded boy was standing on the pavement looking at him. The face was teasingly familiar, but there was no time to worry about that.

"Son," he said. "Would you like to earn yourself half a crown?"

"Yes," said the boy.

"I want you to follow that girl, the one with the red shopping-bag. See if you can find out where she lives."

The boy hesitated.

"It's quite all right," said Petrella. "I'm a policeman."

This wasn't, apparently, what was worrying him.

"Where'll I find you?" he said.

"I'll wait here," said Petrella.

The boy nodded, and disappeared into the crowd. Petrella went into the shop. It was a big shop, and dealt in a multitude of fancy goods that had very little apparent connection with chemistry. Opposite the torch counter he spotted Francesca. She had picked up a torch, and was idly snapping it on and off. But she was not really interested. Soon she put it down, and made for the door. Petrella got behind a display of hot-water bottles, and watched her go.

Then, swallowing a lump which had come into his throat, he sought out the manager and introduced himself. "I want you," he said, "to see if you've got any stock missing."

"A snap check, you mean. That's almost impossible. We've got too many lines."

Petrella considered the matter. "What are your most valuable items—weight for money?"

"Beauty preparations," said the manager promptly.

"Try those first."

The assistant at the beauty counter made a rapid count of her stock, consulted some crumpled pieces of paper, made a calculation, and turned up a worried face.

"I can't be sure till I've checked," she said, "but I think there's about half a dozen of those jars of special face cream gone."

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"Half a guinea a jar," said the manager. "Do you think you'll be able to get them back?"

"I'll have a good try," said Petrella.

It was more than half an hour later, and he had nearly given up hope, when the boy reappeared.

"Carrington Street," he said. "No. 65, first floor back. Name of Padulo."

It did not occur to Petrella to question the information. He fished out a florin and a sixpence and handed them over. As he did so, something in the composed gravity with which the boy accepted his reward touched the chord of memory.

"You're the violinist," he said. "I heard you play at the cinema. The night you won the first prize."

"Oh, that," said the boy. It might have been Wellington speaking of Vimiero or Napoleon of Austerlitz. Waterloo was many years ahead.

"I thought you played very nicely."

The boy smiled his sad, composed smile. "I'm glad you enjoyed it," he said. "I expect you'll be seeing me on TV soon. I believe my agent has just signed a contract." He pocketed the money, and was gone before Petrella could think of anything to say.

No. 65 Carrington Street was a large house, of red brick, wholly attached to No. 63 on the left and No. 67 on the right, and given over to apartments.

A card beside the third bell from the bottom said *Mario Padulo* in gothic script, and *Ring twice and walk up* in pencil. Petrella climbed the stairs heavily. A small voice in his head was saying, "There is much enmity against us. People envy us our talents. Our little successes."

Mario opened the door himself. His smile was warm. His brown eyes fathomless.

"I realized when I met you," he cried, "that you were a true friend. Come in. Come in."

In his comparatively short career Petrella had experienced little difficulty in reconciling his sentiments as a man to his duties as a policeman. Now it came to him that he was going to do something hateful.

"I don't know that you'll be so glad to see me." The words seemed to have a forced, unnatural quality, as if he had written them down and learnt them by heart before he spoke them.

"I shall always be glad to see you. Sit down. Sit down."

Petrella did not sit. He stood uncomfortably in the badly-furnished, overcrowded room and said, "How many daughters have you got, Mr. Padulo?"

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"Two only."

"Francesca I met. She is dark. Would the other be a blonde?"

"Angelica. Yes, she is very fair. Very English. Her mother was an English woman, I think."

Petrella ignored the gambit.

"Do they go out together," he said sternly, "both carrying identical red plastic shopping-bags?"

"I believe they both have red shopping-bags, yes." There was no alarm in the voice. The brown eyes were guileless.

"It is Francesca, I think, who actually steals from the counters of shops. As soon as she has made a haul, she exchanges bags with her sister. Thus, if she is observed, she is safe."

There was a long silence. Then Mario made such a gesture with his hands as only a Latin and an artist could have achieved. There was surprise in it, and regret. And tolerance. Tolerance for a friend who had fallen short of the standards expected of him.

"I suppose you have reasons. You must have reasons for saying such a thing."

"Only this. That when I was called to Carleton's Stores a few days ago—Francesca will have told you what happened—"

Mario nodded, but without speaking.

"I ran into a girl coming out. I didn't know it at the time, but it was Angelica."

"Yes?"

"This afternoon Francesca was in Bellboy's. They have just discovered the loss of three or four guineas' worth of beauty preparations. Again I saw her sister coming out."

"And on such evidence you found an accusation?"

"Yes," said Petrella, steadily. "I do."

Mario turned the matter over in his mind. "How long ago was this?"

"Less than an hour."

"Part of your story is true. Angelica came in half an hour ago. And I noticed that she had her bag with her. This is not just one occasion. You accuse them of persistent stealing?"

"Yes," said Petrella. "I do."

"And you have brought a search-warrant with you?"

"No. I had no time for that."

"I give you full permission," said Mario, "to search where you wish. Ours is not a large or a palatial dwelling. It should not take long for you to convince yourself."

Petrella hesitated. He badly wanted to search. And he urgently desired to find himself wrong. But he was aware of the risk. Mario could so easily repudiate his permission. His

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thoughts were read. "Would you like me," said Mario, "to repeat my invitation in the presence of a witness?"

"No," said Petrella. "I'll trust you."

The brown eyes looked grateful.

It was not a long search. The sort of goods that Petrella was seeking were bulky: dozens of bottles or jars; new shoes and gloves; articles by the dozen that the ordinary shopper buys singly. Such were the unmistakable fruits of systematic looting. And the hiding-places were few.

At the end of a busy half hour, he straightened his back and said, "I apologize. I have made a fool of myself by jumping to conclusions."

"I forbid you to apologize," said Mario. "You are a policeman. You have your duty. I shall not say a word about this to anyone. It will be a secret between the two of us."

In the end, and after an uneasy night of heart-searching, Petrella told the whole story to Superintendent Haxtell.

He expected, at the best, to be laughed at. But Haxtell simply said, "Why are you so sure you were wrong?"

"If there'd been anything, sir, I'd have been bound to find it."

"Supposing they'd taken fright, and cleared the stolen stuff out. It wouldn't have taken them long."

"But don't you see? I was round there inside the hour. And they'd no reason to suppose—that time—that anything was wrong. I agree they might have stopped after the fuss in Carleton's Stores—or laid low for a bit. But, from their point of view, there was nothing wrong with the job at Bellboy's. It had gone well—"

"You're talking now as if they did it."

"Yes. I mean, no. I don't know," said Petrella miserably.

The Superintendent looked at him thoughtfully. "Good may come of it," he said. "If they were innocent, there's no real harm done. If they weren't—well, I really think they will have taken fright. One good fright's often all people like that need."

Petrella said, "Thank you, sir," and meant it. Then he resolutely put the Padulo family out of his head.

It was "Square" Peggs who reminded him of them some evenings later. It was Petrella's habit, when he was out late, to call in at the all-night café for a final cup of coffee and a gossip.

"I see young Florian's struck oil," said Peggs.

"Florian who?"

"Florian Padulo. Clever kid."

"Do you mean he's Mario's kid?"

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"That's right. Like I told you. He's got three of 'em. Two girls and a boy. You wouldn't hardly think they were brothers and sisters if you saw 'em together. One's got black hair, one's a real blonde, and the boy's a regular copper knob. All different mothers, I should think. Some men can get away with anything." Peggs sucked thoughtfully on a tooth and added, "Mind you, I like 'em. And they've all got talent. Only the boy's something special."

Petrella said, with a cold-feeling certainty that he knew the answer, "What's his line?"

"Plays the violin," said Peggs. "Won a competition at the local cinema the other day. Must have been some talent scouts about. He's signed up for a TV contract, I hear."

"Blast 'em," said Petrella, "they won't get away with this."

"No reason they shouldn't," said Peggs. "It's been done before." But Petrella was gone.

Next morning, without any particular plan in his head, he made his way round to Carrington Street. Something was happening outside No. 65. There was a crowd filling the pavements and flowing out onto the road. And drawn up by the kerb was a big green van with a television camera on the roof.

The departure of the latest candidate for stardom was being televised.

Grouped outside the shabby house was Florian, complete with violin and the famous cold, withdrawn smile that now flutters the hearts of so many million viewers; Mario, a paternal arm round his boy, Angelica—and Francesca.

And so he saw her, for the fifth and the last time.

She was talking to a stout man in black coat and pinstripe trousers, with a gold chain encircling his stomach. She was smiling with a warmth that suggested that he was, at least, a theatrical agent.

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YEA OR NEIGH?

The Romans had no word for *yes*,
So mean they were, and stiff,
With *si* the Italians make you guess
—Their *yes* conceals an *if*;
Oui means no more than "so I hear;"
Ja sounds a little coarse;
Then, child, say *yes*, polite and clear—
Not *uh-uh*, like a horse.

ROBERT GRAVES, *Yes*

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THE HIGH PLACES

Thirty storeys of steel revolved below him in a dizzy, swirling web

BY WILLIAM E. BARRETT

ON the night before the Montoya fight, Joe Danelik would not have changed places with anyone in the world. He had put in a day's work on the steel skeleton of the new Parkview Building, he had boxed four fast rounds in the gym, and he was not tired. He felt alert, alive, charged with vitality.

He walked the dark stretch of Munsey Street, climbed Cobbler Hill, and turned into Schumann Street. Schumann, like Munsey, was a street of terrace houses, of narrow, two-storey houses with white porticoes. Schumann Street had a distinction and a difference: Jeanie Keller lived there.

She was waiting inside the half-open door of No. 1963 and she came out when she heard his step. A shaft of light from the Keller living-room fell across her as she drew the door shut behind her; a dark, slender girl in a blue coat, wearing a gold-trimmed blue beret. She took the three steps to the pavement like a dancer, touching them lightly.

"Hi, Joe," she said.

"Hi, Jeanie." Joe Danelik did not stop walking, he merely shortened his stride. He swept the girl into step without touching her.

There was a certain rhythm that belonged to them, just the two of them, as there was a certain excitement that belonged to them. He felt it when he drew near to any place where she was, when he heard her voice, when her heels clicked against the pavement in time with his heavier tread.

They walked down the dark street, not speaking to each other. It was, they had found, the way they liked it, starting slowly and letting emotion build up a little in the silence. The lights were on in all the identical living-rooms behind all the identical yellow blinds. The Danelik house on Munsey Street was exactly like the Keller house on Schumann, and the neighbouring houses were the same. A young couple, starting out, could find a duplicate of the houses in which they had grown up without any difficulty, and many of them did; on Crocker Street, or Corbin,

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or Holly, or Christopher, any of a dozen more. It wasn't what Joe Danelik or Jeanie Keller wanted.

" I want a house with windows all round, and a white kitchen, and bright colours, and furniture that I can lift. I want brand-new shiny things, Joe . . . " Jeanie had told him that one night, sitting on a stone fence out in the exclusive Country Club district where neither of them belonged. " I want a hose, Joe, and something other than pavement to squirt it on."

" Why not? " he said.

He hadn't been able to say any more than that. He was proud of Jeanie because she wanted such things, touched and inarticulate in face of the fact that she trusted him to supply them. He knew then that he loved Jeanie, and that she knew it, but they had never told each other and they hadn't talked about marriage except indirectly. He looked across a wide lawn at a house with tall white pillars and he knew, as Jeanie knew, that they would never have anything like that. They did not have to have anything like that. A house with windows all round did not have to be big.

" Why not? " he said again, taking the dream from her and making it his own, dreaming with her, moving in time with the same music.

Tonight they were on their way, knowing what they wanted, walking together on Schumann Street. They stopped, by mutual consent, at the corner of Belmont. The poster advertising the fight was in the window of Flynn's Tavern. Joe's picture was on it; Joe Danelik, middle-weight. He was wearing white trunks and he had his left hand extended, his right cocked. It was quarter-profile. There was a picture of Frankie Montoya, too, the pug he was fighting tomorrow: full-face in a half crouch.

Joe could feel Jeanie pressing close to him. " I get frightened, thinking about it," she said. " I always get frightened."

He laughed at her, feeling tall. " You don't have to worry, baby," he said. " We need him to help us buy furniture."

His hand found the girl's hand and gripped it, liking the warm softness of it. They walked more slowly, turning into Ohio Avenue as they always did. The furniture shop had a big flashing sign and brightly lighted windows. They looked at those windows every night because a fighter in training had to be in bed early, and they did not want to go anywhere else.

The living-room furniture in one window was of light, natural wood, modern, with fragile-looking legs on the couch and the chairs, green-and-grey striping on the upholstery. The rug was called " sand " and it looked like sand. There were two tables, with lamps with square-cut grey shades.

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" Day after tomorrow, we'll buy it."

Joe Danelik felt a glow of pride in saying that, in feeling Jeanie's fingers tighten on his own. Nobody else in that neighbourhood walked in and bought furniture, a whole room at a time, paying cash for it. Nobody else in the neighbourhood was a main-event fighter.

He moved slowly down the line of windows with Jeanie to the dining-room. They already owned that. They owned the bedroom too, and a refrigerator for the kitchen. In two months more, in June, they would be married. They would have to start in a flat but maybe by the autumn, the way he was going, he would have enough to make a down payment on a house.

They passed beyond the last lighted window of the furniture shop. The windows of the ironmonger's were dark. They stopped there, in the doorway, and Jeanie turned to him, moving into his arms.

" Joe," she said huskily, " it's all so wonderful. I can hardly wait."

He pressed her close to him, feeling her lips against his, the taut eagerness of her young body as she stood on tiptoe to meet his kiss. The world of Joe Danelik was a wonderful world and life was very good to him.

The steel skeleton of the Parkview Building rose high above the squat, flat-roofed buildings along the river. In the early morning, it looked grim and cold. Joe Danelik checked in and the timekeeper winked at him.

" Boss wants to see you, Joe."

Joe Danelik nodded. He was not surprised. He was a rivet boy, a carrier of rivet kegs to working crews, a humble job as high-level steel jobs are measured, but a man's job. He carried weight and he climbed with it, and he walked the narrow girders high above the street. On the day of a fight he usually drew a simpler assignment. Tom Mallory, the foreman, did not let him get tired. The gangs had a certain pride in him and they bet on him.

There were two men with Mallory when Joe found him; a short, stocky young man with a camera, and a tall, thin youth who was smoking a cigarette.

" These two gentlemen are from the newspapers," Mallory said. " They want to see the top. Take care of them, Joe."

" Sure."

It was even easier than he expected. Joe looked the two men over with casual interest. The only newspapermen he knew were sports writers, and he did not like them too well. They wrote about him and said that he was " a fancy Dan " and that he

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fought with his right hand in his pocket, that he could not punch his way out of a wet paper sack. They expected every fighter to be a slugger and they did not appreciate a boxer who could lick sluggers without getting his hair mussed. He led the way to the hoist.

"This'll take us up to the eighteenth floor," he said. "After that, we climb."

The two newspapermen moved gingerly to the centre of the hoist. The tall one, evidently the reporter, for the other man carried camera equipment, looked frightened. The hoist was a temporary lift, open on four sides. It moved upward slowly, vibrating noisily, into the steel network. The girder ghosts were walking when they reached the tenth floor, wraiths of vapour that rose from the steel as some of the night chill went out of it. The roofs of the nearer buildings were beneath them and there was a haze over the river. People on a distant side street, glimpsed through the metalwork, looked like sluggish insects.

The reporter sat down. His face was white.

Joe Danelik looked over the side. A gang was busy down below, unloading the steel for the lift engine-house and the roofing. He could not understand people like the reporter who were afraid of heights. It was a fear that he had never felt. He was frightened in the ring sometimes, but only at first, before he got warmed up. Tonight's fight did not worry him at all. He could think about it almost indifferently, riding up among the naked beams of the upper floors.

Frankie Montoya was the first "name fighter" he had ever fought. A win tonight would mean national attention even if Montoya was not as good as he had been. Frankie Montoya had fought two champions. He had lost to them, but neither of them had knocked him out. Nobody had ever knocked him out, and neither would Joe Danelik, who was a boxer. Frankie Montoya was an infighter, a hooker. Joe was fast and he had a lightning left hand. He could keep away from a hooker, keep him off balance, and jab him silly.

The hoist creaked to a stop at the eighteenth floor. Joe Danelik stepped out onto the temporary flooring of planks that rested on the girders. The photographer followed him, stepping gingerly. The reporter was slow in gaining his feet. His skin was pasty, a sick white. Joe Danelik felt a sudden surge of sympathy for him.

"It's safe up here," he said. "Just don't look down if it makes you dizzy. Look up."

He glanced aloft himself as he spoke, then wondered if looking up was any better for someone who was frightened. The great

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steel framework was, for the most part, wide open. The bellman was standing out on a projection at the very top, looking down into the street. The fiery rivets were arc-ing through the air from heater platforms on the twenty-sixth floor to catchers on the girders of the twenty-eighth, who leaned for them with their black and battered buckets. Riveters manned their rivet guns on temporary platforms at the connection points where vertical and horizontal girders met, levered together by operators with dolly-bars. Rivet boys and other workers walked the narrow beams at the various levels.

Behind them all, as one looked up, was the deep blue sky with its valleys and canyons slashed through rumpled mountains of cloud.

It probably would not do a man any good to look up. Joe Danelik shrugged. There wasn't anything that he could do about it. He led the way forward, suddenly conscious of the wind which was blowing out of the north-east, not hard but with a steady pressure. A high-level worker took the wind for granted, adapting himself to it, not thinking about it. A stranger aloft would probably worry about it.

The stairs were solid enough, but there were no handrails, nothing on either side but space. Joe set an easy, deliberate, climbing pace, aware that the men behind him were grunting and panting after two flights.

At the end of three, the photographer called to him. "Hey! How about a break?"

He stopped. The reporter was already seated on a step, his body hunched into an awkward twisted posture. The photographer sank down on another step. "Lord!" he said. "What a way to earn a living! How far to the top?"

He would know if he looked up. "Five more flights of stairs," Joe Danelik said.

He did not mention the ladders, but he wondered how the two men would make out on them. The stairs stopped at the twenty-sixth floor. A man had to climb ladders to the thirtieth. There was no other way to the top.

"O.K.," the photographer said. "I'll take a few shots from here. Then let us lead the rest of the way. How about it?"

"Sure."

Joe Danelik watched the photographer take his pictures. The reporter did not move until the other man touched him on the shoulder.

He rose stiffly then, mechanically, and followed the photographer up the stairs. He did not climb them like a man; he went up like an animal, on all fours, his hands touching each step.

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I wonder if he feels safer that way? Joe Danelik, following him, was uneasy. Such naked fear was disturbing. His initial contempt for the reporter was supplanted now by sympathy. The paper should not have sent a man on such an assignment as this if he was afraid of heights. Maybe the man did not tell them. Proud. Or afraid of losing his job.

They rested twice more on the way up, then they reached the end of the stairs. They stood on a platform of planks laid loosely across the girders. The wind pushed against them powerfully and the city's other tall buildings floated in a haze beyond and in most cases below them, seeming close, almost close enough to hit with a flipped cigarette.

The pneumatic hammers filled the air with noise and vibration, the rivets sizzled through space, and men walked backwards and forwards on the narrow beams above their heads. The mast and boom of the derrick stood against the background of sky, almost on top of them, but there were four flights of ladders leading to it, toothpick things against the massiveness of steel. The cameraman looked at the ladders and swore.

" It's got to be the top," he said. " Nothing less than the top, the boss told us. Hey, Terry."

He turned towards the reporter. The reporter was staring in horror at the ladders. His eyes had a glassy look. Joe Danelik had seen that look in the eyes of fighters. It came usually the second before the fighter went down on his face. The reporter did not go down. He turned slowly and started to walk away. He walked as a sleep-walker walks, stiffly, without rhythm, blindly. There was nothing ahead of him but the edge of the platform, the foreshortened skyline, open, yawning space.

" *Hey !* " It took a split second for Joe to realize what was happening. He was in motion as he yelled, moving with a trained fighter's speed across the rattling, vibrating planks.

The reporter, like a mechanical doll, kept marching and there was no more platform. His right foot was coming down on a plank that was not there when Joe Danelik dived for him.

The man's body turned in Joe's grip and he could feel it sliding through his arms as he fell. He was hanging from the platform himself, his stomach on the boards with the cage of his ribs against the edge. The fingers of his left hand fastened onto the man's belt and held. He shifted his right hand swiftly to the collar and heaved back. The boards lifted slightly under the double weight and defeated him. He was half on his side with nothing to brace on, nothing to hold against the pull of gravity except his own weight.

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The reporter's body was limp, dead weight, but he had bent it in heaving back so that he was pulling the man's chest into the boards with his right hand, holding against the slide into space with his left. He could feel his own body inching slowly along the boards, moving almost imperceptibly towards the long fall. Over the back of the man he held, he could see the deep well and the shimmering bottom.

The beams crossed and criss-crossed, looking large and widely spaced on the nearer floors, narrowing and coming closer as they descended, running together in a cubist design, seeming to incline one way, then another. He could hear men yelling and he was aware that the rivet guns had stopped. He could see men moving on the girders and his eyes followed the long lines of steel to the ground level.

Crazy geometric designs formed, moved, swirled, and assumed new shapes as he stared at them. He pitted his whole weight against the weight of the man he held, and against the slow, deadly slide that was carrying them into the weird web below. He was fascinated, half hypnotized, and he could not close his eyes.

The girders were starting to revolve like a huge pin-wheel when someone grabbed him. There were several men around him all at once, strong men, steel men. They hauled him back from the edge of the platform, and they took the reporter from him, and they stood him on his feet.

Bill Nelson, one of the derrick crew, gripped Joe Danelik's jaws on either side of his chin and turned his head so that he could look into his eyes; like a referee sizing up a groggy fighter.

"Are you O.K.?" he said.

Joe Danelik shook his shoulders and winced. He wasn't O.K.

"Sure," he said.

"Good. Go up there and get me a rivet. Tell Pete Sarron I sent you."

Bill Nelson was pointing to the heater who was standing beside his forge two floors above. The only way of reaching that forge was to climb the ladder and walk the beam. Bill Nelson was not his boss. Joe Danelik wanted to swear at him and tell him to go himself, but the habit of obedience to authority was strong. He was still half hypnotized, and he was moving towards the ladder before the impulse of revolt took shape.

He climbed slowly and his left arm shrieked in protest when he gripped the rungs. He climbed the second ladder and stood with his back against an upright, looking towards the forge. There were about fifty feet of narrow girder to walk, with nothing on either side and the whole city far below. He knew what was

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down there. He had seen it across the body of a man who was slipping into it.

Fear came to him, standing there against the upright, and shook him.

Two floors below, Bill Nelson put two fingers to his mouth and whistled shrilly.

Joe Danelik took a deep breath and started out. He felt the wind pushing him and he had to concentrate on balance, placing his feet carefully. The girder seemed slick and slippery. He had a panicky impulse to sit down astride it and hang on. A thousand times he had hurried back and forth on slender paths of steel like this, carrying kegs of rivets. He breathed now with difficulty and he did not dare look down.

The forge was suddenly there, directly ahead of him, and he read concern in Pete Sarron's swarthy face. Pete Sarron was wondering about him as he himself had wondered about the reporter. He stiffened his shoulders.

" Gimme a rivet," he said.

He was all right going back. He walked and he did not think about it. Bill Nelson was waiting and he accepted the rivet solemnly.

" I'm sorry, Joe," he said. " I had to do it."

" Sure. I know." He did know. If he had not walked that girder when he did, he would never have walked another. He went down and people crowded around him. The photographers took his picture and Tom Mallory sent him home.

At ten minutes past nine, Joe Danelik lay on the rubbing-table in his small arena dressing-room. The noise of the fight crowd was a subdued humming, rising occasionally to bursts of sound. Max Riegel, his manager was walking around, waving his hands.

" You should have told me," he said. " You should have told me earlier. Your only strong point is your left hand. Now you haven't got it."

" You couldn't have done a damned thing."

Joe Danelik had been fighting that fight with himself all afternoon, ever since his left arm began to stiffen and ache. Gus Opperman, the promoter, had had to bring Frankie Montoya from out of town and pay him a big guarantee. He was paying Joe Danelik the largest purse he had ever received for a fight. The supporting fights were fifth-rate because the principals were getting all the money. The house was sold out. A postponement, with refunds on tickets, would ruin Gus Opperman, who always gave a square deal.

Max Riegel was still walking up and down. " With your left

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hand, you'd stand a good chance," he said. "Montoya isn't so nippy on his feet any more. All he can do now is hit . . ."

"Shut up, Max."

Joe closed his eyes. He did not want to listen to talk and he did not want to think. If it hadn't been for that damned reporter, sliding off into space, twisting his left arm!

Max was standing over him.

"You've got to fight him left-handed," he said. "Stay away from him. Keep him off with your right."

"Sure."

Joe had thought of that himself. He slid off the rubbing-table when the call-boy stuck his head in the door. It was time to go. He wanted to get it over.

The walk down the aisle to the ring, white under the lights, was a long walk, longer than the walk across the girder and much the same thing. Frankie Montoya was in the ring first and getting a big hand. Most of the crowd had seen his best fights on television and they knew him. They reserved a bigger ovation, however, for Joe Danelik. He was the home-town boy, the young fighter coming up.

Joe waved and smiled mechanically. He went out into the centre of the ring for the usual instructions and touched gloves with Frankie Montoya. He heard his own weight announced as eleven stone six pounds and Montoya's as eleven stone seven. The figures registered but they did not mean anything. He was glad that Jeanie Keller did not come to fights and that this one would not be on TV.

The bell rang.

He saw Frankie Montoya then for the first time, as instinct took command of his actions and his opponent came into sharp focus. The veteran moved out in a half crouch, his hands held high. His face was broad and hammered and scarred, bearded black, his eyes were narrowed slits under shelves of scar tissue. He bobbed to his left as he advanced, feinting, moved to his right, and shot his left hand. Joe speared him with a straight right, missed with another, feinted with his left, and scored again with the right. Montoya was short with four punches, cautious, puzzled.

Left-handers were always difficult opponents and Frankie Montoya had not been prepared.

Joe Danelik felt awkward but he gained confidence as he went along, shooting the right as he would normally shoot his left, feeling strong in the legs. Frankie Montoya shuffled and wove, taking the right hand stoically, studying his opponent, timing him, getting his rhythm. With the round nearly over, he exploded.

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He came in under the right hand and scored half a dozen times to the body, hooking, tying up Joe's right hand. Joe uppercut desperately with his left and felt a wave of agony go through him. That one punch of his own hurt him more than the dozen short chopping punches he took as Montoya stayed in close. The bell was a welcome respite.

Max Riegel bent over him in the corner, worry in his voice. " Stay away from him till he tires," he said. " Never mind how it looks."

" Sure." It was an easy thing to say. The manager wasn't in there with Frankie Montoya. There was no escape for a man without weapons. The ring wasn't big enough. So far, Frankie had been cautious ; but once he discovered the truth about that left hand . . .

He found out quickly. The second round was less than a minute old before Montoya was inside, wrestling. He locked up the left and turned his body, putting weight on it. Joe Danelik winced and felt sick. Frankie Montoya knew then what he had already suspected. He grinned suddenly and crossed his right.

The punch rocked Joe and the storm broke. Frankie Montoya was all over him, bobbing to the left, then the right, ignoring the flicking right hand, pouring punches from every angle. He pinned Joe on the ropes and Joe used his great strength, developed in the handling of steel, to throw him off.

" Keep away! Keep away! " Max Riegel's voice was lost in the chorus of well-wishers shouting the same advice.

Joe back-pedalled desperately and the crouching, weaving Montoya stalked him, forcing him to the ropes again, raining blows on him; to his body, to his head, to the body, to the head again. Joe's right hand was a clumsy foil and he could not punch with the left. He came off the ropes and reeled out into the centre of the ring. Frankie Montoya was no longer cautious. He followed him, swinging.

When the bell rang, Joe Danelik could not find his corner. Max Riegel came out and led him to his stool. Max was no longer talking about staying away.

" The ref is looking you over," he said. " If you go down, even once, he's going to stop it."

It wasn't conversation; it sounded like advice. Max Riegel did not expect him to last ten rounds. Max thought that the sooner he went down, the better it would be. He could slide to the canvas during any of these flurries and nobody would blame him or criticize him. Joe Danelik sprawled on his stool and felt the cold water being splashed on his body, the sting of collodion in the cut above his left eye.

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Thinking was a fragmentary process. He was licked. No more big time. No more big purses. No down payment on a house for Jeanie. It couldn't be like that. He couldn't let it be.

Looking across the ring was like looking across a thin sliver of girder above empty space. He did not want to walk it. He wanted to stay where he was. The ten-second buzzer sounded and his body stiffened. It was like Bill Nelson's whistle. There were things that a man had to do, whether he wanted to do them or not. The bell rang.

He stumbled in getting away from his corner, but he got away from it. He came out as he had always come out, abandoning the futile pretext of fighting left-handed. Frankie Montoya swarmed into him and he could not jab with his left ; he could only hold it high as a partial shield. The bobbing, weaving Montoya was sensing the kill and he punched with the relentless rhythm of a rivet gun. Joe Danelik retreated under the steady fire.

He was no longer a boxer, a fancy Dan who never got his hair mussed. He was bruised and bloody and he was down off his toes, flat-footed, holding the one hand that he had, holding it cocked. Frankie Montoya's left landed, then the right, the left again, the right. He breathed deeply and the left was a shade slow. It was the moment for which Joe Danelik had waited. He crossed his right, punching with it, not jabbing, putting the long muscles of his back into it.

Frankie Montoya went down like a man hit by a derrick boom.

The house was filled with roaring sound that beat around the ring. Joe lost precious seconds finding the neutral corner to which the referee waved him. The cut over his eye was bleeding again and he pawed at it with his glove. The referee was counting. Frankie Montoya got up at nine and Joe charged him.

The veteran was dazed and groggy but he was still hard to hit with a right hand. He bobbed and rolled, hooking with both hands to Joe's body, his eyes glassy but his body in constant motion, his hands moving. Joe clubbed at him with his right, wrestled with him when he came in close, tried to hit with his left, then got the opening that he wanted and crossed the right cleanly once more. Frankie Montoya fell into him and hung on desperately. The bell rang.

They worked on Joe Danelik in his corner and Max Riegel talked to him. He heard the high, excited voice, but none of the words made sense. He was holding on to one thought desperately: *I hurt him. I've got to get him next round. I've got to.*

He did not know what round it was, but he went into it slugging. Frankie Montoya was still dazed, but he could punch.

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Joe traded with him, taking two punches to land one, three punches to land one, falling into a clinch, taking two again, three again. The pin-wheel of steel girders was starting to revolve before his eyes and the well of distance was deep. One hand wasn't enough.

Halfway through the round, Frankie Montoya missed with a savage left and swung round, fighting momentarily for balance. He seemed to hang there like a puppet while Joe Danelik whisked his right over. The right landed on the slack jaw and that was it.

Frankie Montoya went down on his face in the ring and, after the first convulsive quiver of his muscles, he lay motionless.

Joe Danelik stood swaying and the referee lifted his arm. The voice of the crowd was a deep and rumbling roar, with shrill, whistling overtones. He heard it from a great distance as he stood there, feeling nothing, thinking nothing—nothing at all.

It was dark on Schumann Street. The lights behind the yellow blinds were out, and men who had to be at work early in the morning were in bed. Jeanie Keller was sitting on the steps of No. 1963 and she came swiftly to her feet when she heard Joe Danelik's step.

Joe Danelik was not striding as briskly as he usually did. He was wearing a big white dressing over one eye and his face was puffed and swollen. His body felt like one big bruise and the doctor who stitched his eyebrow had bandaged his left arm. There was light enough from the street lamp on the corner for Jeanie to see him when he stopped.

"Joe!" There was fright in her voice, almost terror.

She ran to him and he put his right arm around her, wincing as he drew her against the aching cage of his ribs. "I'm O.K., Jeanie," he said.

"You're not. You're hurt. Oh Joe!"

"No. It's all right. I'm sorry."

He felt embarrassed. He had come to her from other fights without frightening her, marked very little, if at all. He looked like the wrong end of a motor accident now and he couldn't help it. She didn't understand. Her hand went up to his face, touching it tenderly. She was crying.

"Don't be sorry," she said. "Please don't, Joe. We don't need a lot of silly things. We . . ."

He knew then that she had not heard. She never wanted to hear about his fights until he came and told her. She did not know he had won. She thought he had lost. But she wouldn't let it make any difference to her, losing a fight, a house, a lot of things they wanted. She was crying against him, patting him.

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He drew her more tightly against him, ignoring the protest of his bruised flesh. "We'll have them, baby," he said. "All of them. I won, Jeanie. Nothing'll stop us now."

He could see it as he said it. He was a boxer who had discovered that he could punch, punch murderously. He could go to the top with what he had. For a moment, as the pain signals flashed to his brain from his aching ribs, he seemed to be hanging on the edge of the platform again, looking down a funnel of steel, seeing the world through the wrong end of the binoculars. He was in the ring, seeing the two pumping fists of Frankie Montoya, and behind Frankie Montoya there were other men, other fists. He breathed deeply.

"We're going right to the top, Jeanie."

He kissed her and the salt of her tears was on her lips. She was the dream beyond his realities. How much a man had to take to make such things come true!

She rose on tiptoe to meet his kiss, and none of the rest of it mattered. The world of Joe Danelik was a wonderful world again and life was very good to him.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to SHIP AHOY on page 26

1. *The ship you are approaching is flying a flag of truce, is in quarantine, has explosives on board, and is about to set sail.*
2. *The Plimsoll line is the ship's load line, marked on the hull, originated* 1876.
3. *i, the Bounty; ii, the Nautilus; iii, the Caine; iv, the Pequod.*
4. *Short shirt; Greenwich.*
5. *Bottom of the sea. Davy Jones was a pirate; another explanation of his locker is that it derives from Devva Lokka, Hindu goddess of death.*
6. 6,080 *feet.*
7. *Technically, a ship is a vessel with bowsprit and three or more masts, square-rigged on all.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Fiddling-stick.* 10, *Ant-hill.* 11, *The muse.* 12, *Army.* 13, *Creed.* 14, *Stot.* 17, *Discard.* 18, *Solicit.* 19, *Absinth.* 22, *Seepage.* 24, *Text.* 25, *Bully.* 26, *Date.* 29, *Reunite.* 30, *Plaudit.* 31, *Bank of England.*

Down. 2, *Isthmus.* 3, *Drip.* 4, *Ill-bred.* 5, *Gutters.* 6, *Toes.* 7, *Caustic.* 8, *Gas and gaiters.* 9, *Fed to the teeth.* 15, *Paint.* 16, *Sleep.* 20, *Saxtuba.* 21, 28. *House of call.* 22, *Salt-pan.* 23, *Abandon.* 27, *Pick.*

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laundry blues

And it all goes into the laundry,
But it never comes out in the wash
RUDYARD KIPLING, *Stellenbosch*

Nothing grows in our garden, only washing. And babies. And where's their fathers live, my love?

DYLAN THOMAS

As I walked by the lakeside quite early one morning,
I heard a pretty maiden a-splashing and singing:
" Oh why did my mammy give me so little warning? "
Was the song that she sang as she rinsed out her linen.
And this was her song as she washed out her kirtles,
As she spread them to dry in the balmy spring breezes
By some long woolly underpants laid on the myrtles:
" There's more to a marriage than shirts and chemises."

MARY CASEY

Witch's Cauldron

He hesitated for a moment. The flying-suit had become his enemy. It was incredibly dirty—dirty far beyond the ordinary dirt of clothes—and to triumph over it, to defeat it, he must wash it white as snow . . . With venomous speed and the vehement strength of anger, Mr. Hacking continued to turn the handle of his washing-machine. His thumb still bled, and the flying-suit, his bitter enemy, was thrashed and beaten by whirling pinions. A tempest of appalling strength was brewing in the interior of the Little Beauty. The water, enormously overcharged with soap, was boiling into a yeasty broth. Volcanic bubbles burst against its straining sides. There was a noise like the dull roaring of a distant storm, that rose to the yelling of a present hurricane.

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"And apart from its saving of time, trouble, money and muscle," shouted Henry, "the most remarkable feature of the Little Beauty is the neatness and cleanness with which it washes all your clothes. You can use it in your drawing-room, and your drawing-room will be none the worse . . . No more cold and dismal mornings in a nasty wash-house, but do your washing in comfort. Do it in the drawing-room, it won't be noticed!"

At this moment the Little Beauty blew up. With the shaking, thunderous, belching noise of a depth-charge going off, its lid was blown away, and a great efflorescence of glittering soap-suds leapt into the palpitating light.

ERIC LINKLATER, *The Sailor's Holiday*

Wet Blankets

There was an enchantment in all the sopping sheets and clothes and blankets stretched across the back lane in the wind and sun. What a scamper there was to bring them inside if it started to rain! In spite of their being hoisted up by the props, the heavy clothes would hang almost to the cobbles, and I would wander, as if in a magical labyrinth, among the tall, wet, swaying walls of wool and cotton with their dank and soapy smell of sunny steam. Sometimes I would almost get lost in those great blank narrow alleys of clammy whiteness, and then it was always a relief to see my mother's comfortable shadow on a sunlit sheet, her arms raised to the line, her head lifted and her mouth full of pegs. On really sunny days, the sheets made a brilliant maze that it was fun to hide in. I can still feel, like a soft, ghostly hand, the faintly-chill touch of a damp and breeze-blown blanket on my cheek and brow.

JAMES KIRKUP, *The Only Child*

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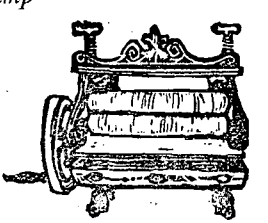
Clean Sheets

It accidentally occurred to her that her master's bed was not made; she therefore went directly to his room, where he happened at that time to be engaged at his bureau. As soon as she saw him, she attempted to retire; but he called her back, and, taking her by the hand, squeezed her so tenderly, at the same time whispering so many soft things into her ears, and then pressed her so closely with his kisses, that the vanquished fair one, whose passions were already raised, and which were not so whimsically capricious that one man only could lay them, though, perhaps, she would have rather preferred that one—the vanquished fair one quietly submitted, I say, to her master's will, who had just attained the accomplishment of his bliss when Mrs. Tow-wouse unexpectedly entered the room, and caused all that confusion which we have before seen, and which it is not necessary, at present, to take any farther notice of; since without the assistance of a single hint from us, every reader of any speculation or experience, though not married himself, may easily conjecture that it concluded with the discharge of Betty, the submission of Mr. Tow-wouse, with some things to be performed on his side by way of gratitude for his wife's goodness in being reconciled to him, with many hearty promises never to offend any more in the like manner; and lastly, his quietly and contentedly bearing to be reminded of his transgressions, as a kind of penance, once or twice a day during the residue of his life.

HENRY FIELDING,
Joseph Andrews

My Kate she is a bonny wife,
There's no more free from evil,
Except upon a washing day.
And then she is a devil.
The very kittens on the hearth,
They dare not even play
Away they jump with many a thump
Upon a washing day.

The deil a bit of comfort is there
On a washing day
For its thump thump scold scold
Thump thump away
The deil a bit of comfort is there.



Ballad from
The Douce Collection of Original Broadsides

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GHOSTS OF LOVE

She had seen them only once
—why did she still remember?

BY JOAN ALLRED

"WELL," Maxine said when the rest of the guests had gone, "here you are, all established with due tribal ceremonies in your own house. How about a little nightcap, Howie darling, and then I'll take my talkative husband and go home?"

Howie busied himself with glasses. His wife Claire gazed round benignly on them all from her green satin love-seat. Howie was flushed and boyish, looked handsome in his dinner jacket despite his widening waistline; and it was good being alone for a few minutes with Bert and Maxine Fletcher, their closest friends. Close now in more than one sense, she thought—neighbours, if people who lived on adjoining quarter-mile segments of sand could be said to have neighbours.

Suddenly Claire was conscious of the strewn tissue paper and curls of coloured ribbon on the floor and, getting to her knees, began to gather them up. "All those presents!" she said. "Everybody was much too extravagant. I feel like a bride."

"Don't worry, dear," Maxine assured her, "it was well worth the price of admittance just to see how you had redecorated this place. They looked in all the cupboards and under all the beds and couldn't think of a word to say. They were laid low en masse."

Claire knelt holding the wrappings and smiled into the glow of the great driftwood log that filled her fireplace. "Did they really like it? Of course none of them saw it before we started. That makes a difference too."

"But we'd all seen it from the outside. I can imagine what it was like in here."

"No, you can't, Maxine—no, you can't possibly," she answered, with a passion surprising even to herself. "It was indescribable."

Maxine clinked ice around in her glass. "If it was as bad as you keep saying, I don't see how you had the courage to buy it."

"I don't know. I suppose it was a sort of challenge . . ."

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Asking herself why they had taken it, she gave up as always. " And the house itself was quite sound in spite of the rack and ruin. Then, they were letting it go for such a ridiculous figure."

" Now, Claire," Howie reminded her a little injuredly, " that wasn't why we took it. Remember I told you, ' Anything within reason. You've waited long enough for your own place, pick it out and I'll write the cheque.' " This last phrase pleased him and he repeated it, looking at Bert and Maxine for approval.

Maxine leaned forward to pat his hand, then turned to her own husband. " Bert, why didn't you think of a nice remark like that at the time we saw the *For Sale* sign? "

The clefts of his cheeks deepened and he darted her a hawk-like glance. " Glad I didn't. I wouldn't live here."

" What do you mean? Ghosts? " Howie laughed till he coughed and had to grope for his handkerchief.

Bert said nothing, just smiled; and Claire, staring at him, knew he understood how it was with the house. " No, Bert didn't mean ghosts, exactly," she said to her husband with a touch of acidity.

So there was some real influence at work, or Bert wouldn't have sensed it. As if someone had touched her with a blunt icicle, she recoiled, her mood of gaiety abruptly gone. The roof was repaired, the walls were remodelled, and the work of the decorators lay about her as they had left it. If the house didn't belong to her now, it never would.

She crushed the tissue paper into a ball and threw it on the fire. " Music," she cried, getting to her feet and sweeping the folds of her gold chiffon dress across the room to the record-player, " that's what we need. Lights out, the way we used to like it when we were all young and foolish and just married."

Obediently they switched the lamps off and then the room was dark except for the fireplace and Maxine's restless cigarette, and the moonlight which now was seen to be at full tide on the terrace. A nocturne by Debussy summoned it inside.

Claire felt the moonlight masking her face and gloving her arms as she lay back, and Bert said, " You're just as beautiful as you were then, Claire."

A compliment for the hostess. " Thank you, Bert."

Somewhere beyond the music and the talk there was that never-ceasing noise of the surf, dragging and draping its black ropes of kelp on the boulders. Claire hoped the sound of the sea wouldn't begin to annoy her. She'd always loved it before.

Maybe she worried on account of the children. Who wouldn't, with all the rip tides and undertows people talked about? And after what had happened—no, she didn't want to think of it

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again, but it would come, no matter how she tried to force it back, after the way Larry and Iona Mason had been found washed ashore among the wreckage of their boat.

Drunk as usual, everybody said, or they'd never have gone sailing at night. So that was why their house came up for sale, and nobody who knew the Masons had been surprised, though they deplored the horror of such a tragedy.

Claire and Howie had never heard of the Masons until afterwards. That would have made no difference anyway, they told each other; but Mr. Pilgrim, the estate agent, had been very discreet the day he drove them out there. He had spoken of nothing but the view and the good weathertight walls and the basically sound plumbing.

The house had delighted her at first sight, standing all rough stone and stained shingles among its land-leaning pines, with patches of tawny sandflowers invading the garden.

" As you can see," Mr. Pilgrim remarked, " the former owners had let it go for a long time. They didn't take much pride in the place. But that's your good luck—" here he combined a chuckle with a grunt, forcing the door open, " because there won't be so much to undo when you redecorate. Everything in here goes with the place," he added hopefully, and Claire, stepping through, had fallen silent in the presence of a supreme and total disorder.

Dust—that was to be expected in any house left vacant even for a week; but certainly not German poetry inscribed on the walls in charcoal . . . not a magnificent dining-table with legs sawn short, its finish marred with hundreds of rings from wet glasses, not a bouquet of winebottles slung from the chandelier, nor a knee-high peak of varicoloured wax rising from the hearth to meet stalactites of candle drippings which fell from a corner of the mantelpiece. Nor, in the centre of its handsome, solid design, a crudely carved heart with the initials " L " and " I " intertwined. Claire could have wept when she saw the mantelpiece, which at that time seemed irreclaimable.

" No chairs," commented Mr. Pilgrim. " It takes all kinds, eh? " He chuckled again and shook his head tolerantly, making light of the spectacle before them.

" They seem to have got round that neatly enough by cutting their table down and sitting on the floor," Claire pointed out. Her throat was tight with anger and dislike for whatever woman had lived here, and treated fine objects with such disrespect.

Behind her, Ronnie and Philip, aged thirteen and ten, peered for avenues of exploration, and were off like pups through the nearest door.

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Mr. Pilgrim looked disturbed and raised his eyebrows and voice, " Boys! Just a minute."

To their parents he murmured, " I didn't explain about one of the rooms. Maybe you'd prefer them not to see it just yet—"

Mystified, Claire called the boys back, and waited with them while Howie accompanied the reluctant Mr. Pilgrim to the room in question. He returned after several minutes, his usually calm face marked with an expression half disapproving, half pleased.

" Go ahead, dear," he said. " It's all right. Nothing you shouldn't see. I'll explain to Ronnie and Phil."

She made her way through an obstacle course of magazines and books that had slid out of their stacks against the walls, and down a hall screened on one side like a windbreak.

Mr. Pilgrim was pointing out the charm of the vista thus revealed, and the practicability of substituting glass for the torn and rusted screen. Yes, she saw the place in her mind, shelved for pots of ivy and her collection of old ruby glass, against the backcloth of pines and ocean. It was a thought to soothe resentment and stir imagination.

She went alone into what was plainly by reason of its size and position the chief bedroom; and then stood braced against an instant impulse to withdraw with confused apologies.

To whom? Not to the bed itself, which lay vast as a park beneath its frayed hangings, nor even to the giant mural which covered the walls from floor to ceiling. But to a certain resident, disembodied intimacy that seemed to regard her from all sides—most strangely, in the absence of any living thing.

Forcing her eyes to focus objectively, she saw that the mural depicted nymphs and satyrs crowned with leaves, and painted very skilfully, so far as she could judge. The curious thing—maybe the thing that made the mural disconcerting, apart from the figures' classic state of undress, was the fact that all the nymphs, six or seven of them, had the same features and the same tangled abundance of dark auburn hair. They laughed, they were pensive, wore wicked little smiles, or lay stretched in rich golden flesh tones about the room, mouths shaped for kisses.

All the same model, evidently, and one the artist knew well. The overall effect was—well, exotic, embarrassing. It was that woman, Claire decided. The woman was too real.

She closed the door behind her and leaned against it, not looking at Mr. Pilgrim.

Yes, she thought, it would be better not to let Ronnie and Philip see the room, even fortified with parental remarks on the subject of art and the antiquity of painting from the nude. The atmosphere wasn't sufficiently that of a museum, somehow.

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That was the only time she ever saw the paintings. A week later they were vague as shadows, obscured under a layer of glue-like material.

So it was strange that she could still remember them clearly, like slides projected on her expensive wallpaper.

"Pornographic," she had described them to Maxine, who was fascinated. "I can't imagine how any sane person could permit such paintings, and especially in a bedroom where you presumably like to rest your eyes."

Maxine's expressive nostrils dilated as she said, "I should think Larry Mason did them himself, dear. I never saw any of his work, but they say he was a pretty good artist at one time."

"Really?"

"Then he suddenly went to pieces—took to beachcombing and drinking and . . . and . . ."

"I know what you mean." The housewife in Claire pursed her lips. "Certainly his wife didn't have much time for the sweeping and dusting—if she *was* his wife."

Why had she said that? It must have been an echo of her elder son, who had remarked one day as he helped with the clearing-up, "Those people were just room-mates, I guess. Not married like you and Dad."

"Isn't there some native nonsense about these flowers being lucky?"

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★ *New Short Novel*

CHAIN of CIRCUMSTANCE

OLD HARRY BRENT left the so-called "bridge" at the Lanyon end of the ferry-boat *Hyacinth* and shuffled along the wet deck towards its duplicate at the Sittaford end, where he shoved the lever of the engine-room telegraph over to HALF AHEAD as if he hated the thing. There was a promise of dirty weather and the old man knew that his rheumatism would be killing him before his tour of duty ended at midnight.

In the engine-room, Peter Roberts brought the reverse lever down from LANYON, which was marked on a polished brass plate at the upper end of its travel, to SITTAFORD, similarly marked at the lower. He eased open the regulator. Steam hissed through worn packing-glands and the *Hyacinth* started to claw herself laboriously across the estuary.

On the vehicle deck the ticket collector, Arthur Mutton, went from one to another of the nine vehicles aboard, taking fares.

In the stokehold Charley Agate threw a shovelful of slack into the furnace and spread it over the fire with a skilled twist of the wrist. Then he sat down again on an upturned fruit box and picked up a copy of *Tales for Modern Girls*. The story he was reading at the moment concerned a beautiful young English schoolmistress on holiday, taken prisoner by Sicilian bandits and about to be rescued by an American oil-prospector who had served with the Marine Corps during the war. Charley was enthralled. This was a measure of what the Lanyon-Sittaford Ferry Service could do to a man.

The *Hyacinth*, built in 1926, had a wide, shallow, blunt-ended hull which supported a vehicle deck capable of carrying up to thirty cars or their equivalent in larger vehicles. She had at one time carried a circus, complete with an elephant which had chosen to swim rather than endure her clanking progress across the river,

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By KEM BENNETT

but that is another story. At each end of her vehicle deck were mounted counterbalanced ramps to enable vehicles to be driven on and off, and on either side of the deck she had superstructures, about ten foot high, with what were grandiloquently called "Observation Decks" on top. Of these, the starboard one housed the upper half of the engine-room, a Ladies' Cabin, snug as a police-station waiting-room, and the two glassed-in, coffin-sized boxes that were her bridges; while its counterpart on the other side housed the upper half of the stokehold, a Gentlemen's Cabin, and the toilets.

The *Hyacinth* had no screws nor steering-gear. She worked on two chains stretched across the river. This made her the maritime equivalent of a convict on a treadmill, and she was nautically so humble that she gave way to all comers, down to and including a home-made dinghy manned by a boy of seven with a drip on the end of his nose.

It was autumn. The tourist season was over, which accounted for the fact that the *Hyacinth* was carrying no more than nine vehicles. In the summer she was filled to capacity almost every trip, and the queues of cars waiting to cross the estuary sometimes

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stretched away for a mile or more on both sides. In the winter she crossed empty, as often as not, but nevertheless, under the terms of a county bye-law, she ran backwards and forwards, night and day, every twenty minutes, with the hypnotic regularity of a rolling-ball pendulum on the kind of clock that eighteenth-century craftsmen were pleased to make for the hell of it.

On the eastern side of the estuary her chains were anchored to a slipway built below a huddle of half a dozen cottages forming the hamlet of Sittaford. On the western side a similar slipway bent sharply up at right angles to become the climbing main street of the village of Lanyon, which consisted of a pub, a post office, two shops, and twenty cottages, nearly all of them decorated with signs saying: *Teas served*, *Fresh Eggs*, or *Bed and Breakfast*. Lanyon looked down on Sittaford with as much superiority as London looks down on Manchester. Without the ferry neither village would have existed.

On this trip the *Hyacinth* was roughly in midstream, four minutes out, as it were, from Lanyon, when her starboard chain broke. It went, as usual, at the top of the driving-wheel, and the two ends slithered, clanking, down the conduits into the water.

Peter Roberts jerked down the steam-regulator. He turned and ran up the vertical steel ladder leading to the vehicle deck as easily as if it were a staircase. On deck, with the rain wetting his dark, curly hair and the wind cutting through his worn blue overalls, he came face to face with the skipper.

"Chain's gone, Harry."

Harry Brent was a sagging old man of sixty-three. He wore a stained reefer jacket that reached nearly to his rickety knees, and his skipper's uniform cap had given in all directions with the years so that by now it looked like the corpse of a hat and seemed to need to support itself on its wearer's ears.

"I know. I'm not deaf," he said tetchily, because the weather was making his joints creak like unoiled hinges. "Port or starboard?"

"Starboard."

"Well, the beggar'll have to stay bust till tomorrow. Not goin' to fish about for her in a blow like this, I ain't."

Peter Roberts looked at the old man without affection and nodded before going back to the engine-room. Down in the warm again he struggled with a threat of anger provoked by old Brent's waspishness. He knew this anger. If it started with Harry Brent, it would spread to include Arthur Mutton, poor old Charley Agate, the *Hyacinth*, Lanyon, Sittaford and the whole ruddy place. The spreading had to be stopped before it led to a horrible apathy of hatred, as it had several times in the past. He stopped it.

He opened the regulator and the *Hyacinth* started to move again. Chain, dripping and slimy with green weed, came up to pass over the driving-wheel in the stokehold on the port side of the boat, each link dropping heavily into the notch cut for it in the wheel's periphery. On the starboard side the driving-wheel now ran

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chainless, and Peter Roberts grinned at it from his station behind the cylinder-heads. At least he wouldn't have to listen to its monotonous clank-clank for the rest of the watch. The *Hyacinth* would work on a single chain. She often did, especially in the summer months when the weather was predictable and the tourists impatient.

There were neither foot-passengers nor vehicles waiting to cross at Sittaford. Harry Brent emerged from the bridge and, with his knotted hands deep in the pockets of his reefer jacket, walked past Arthur Mutton onto the slipway.

" Goin' to take five minutes," he muttered, and Mutton nodded.

Harry Brent's cottage lay about thirty yards up the road from the slip. As he walked stiffly towards it his thoughts were concentrated upon a cup of hot tea and some aspirin tablets. It was after five o'clock, but he hoped that the missus would have had the sense to keep the kettle on the hob.

On the *Hyacinth* Arthur Mutton directed the last of the nine cars onto the slipway. He was a pompous old idiot, and acting as traffic policeman for vehicles coming on and off the ferry was the favourite part of his duties: it gave him an illusion of power and importance. When the last car had disappeared he went to stick his head through the stokehold door.

" Tea-time, Charley," he said. " Harry's gone ashore."

Harry Brent found no kettle boiling when he reached his cottage. His wife, a plump little woman, younger than he was, with small hands and feet and brown boot-button eyes, was not in the kitchen, where she should have been, but sitting on the edge of the sofa in the chilly cleanliness of the parlour. She was weeping, and when Harry saw her his rheumatism pained all the more and he cursed himself for not having taken his tea as usual with the others in the stokehold. But then he would have had to go without his aspirins.

" What's up? " he asked gruffly. " What's the tap running for? I want a cup o' tea."

Iris Brent looked up, puffy-eyed. " Mary's gone."

" Eh? "

" I said, Mary's gone! On the town bus with her suitcase."

" Where's she gone? "

" How should I know? " There was drama in her small, sharp voice, as well as an unattractive mixture of outrage and self-pity. " Gone to get a job in London, I s'pose, the ungrateful little demon! Fancies herself as a film star, she does! But she'll come to a bad end. She'll finish on the streets, she will, because it's in her wicked nature . . . After all I've done for her! It's not right, Harry. It's not right, it isn't! How we're to look people in the face I *don't* know . . . "

Harry Brent started to back out of the parlour. " Got to get back to the job," he muttered. " People waitin'. Just came in for a quick cup o' tea. The rheumatism's bad . . . Don't fret, Ma.

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She'll come back soon as her money gives out. You mark my words."

In the kitchen he took a bottle of aspirin from a shelf and went out into the wet again, down the road to the slip and across the *Hyacinth*'s greasy deck to the stokehold door. From the Lanyon side there came the sound of a newly arrived motorist playing tunes on his horn. Harry chose not to hear. He took a mug of steaming tea from Charley Agate, sat down wearily, and said, "Well. She done it: she's gone. Without so much as a thank 'ee for her mother! No address left. Not a word said. Just gone. 'Tain't right, you know. Selfish little baggage!"

There was a silence. Mutton half broke it with muttered condolences. Charley Agate stared distantly into his tea. Presently Arthur Mutton sucked his teeth in a sorrowful way and said aloud, "Old woman cut up, I s'pose?"

Harry Brent nodded dolefully.

"Better get Meg to go over to her." Meg was Mrs. Brent's sister, as well as being Mrs. Arthur Mutton.

"Arrh. I reckon she'd like that." Harry Brent drained his tea. The motorist in Lanyon was blowing his horn with increasing impatience.

Charley Agate muttered nervously, "Maybe we ought to be movin'," but the old man ignored him.

In the background, sitting with his shoulder-blades pressed against the pleasant warmth of a well-lagged steam pipe, Peter Roberts listened and watched. So Mary had found the guts to go, at last. The thought gave him pleasure. Good kid. Only thing to do—up sticks and off. No use arguing with the likes of Harry and Mrs. Brent; they'd wear the hind leg off a donkey with talking, especially the old woman.

He thought of Mrs. Brent with detestation for a moment and then turned his thoughts back to her daughter. Good old Mary. Liable to do all right for herself, too, on the telly or something, with her looks . . .

The thought followed that all this meant that he would now be friendless in Lanyon and Sittaford. A chill of loneliness laid cold fingers on his heart but he neither moved nor shivered because the feeling was too familiar. All the better, really, he thought doggedly. He was a lodger in the Brents' cottage—had to be because the Probation Officer had put him there and he couldn't change lodgings without permission—and with Mary about the place, young and gay and desirable, hanging round his neck and adoring him, he was constantly threatened with the kind of trouble he had to avoid. Without Mary to tempt him into behaving like a human being, it would be easier just to sit and suffer until his sentence of three years of penal supervision was over.

It would be easier, too, to save money, and he had to do that so that, once free, he would be able to take his time over finding a berth that suited him and would never, never have to go back cap in hand to the authorities to whine for help.

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Peter Roberts's thoughts had brought a wintry smile of pleasure to his lean brown face. Harry Brent spotted the gleam of white teeth out of the corner of his eye. "What d'you think you're grinning for, eh?" Irritation had found a vulnerable target at last and the old man's faded blue eyes shone with malice. "You reckon it's funny, I suppose. An' what did you have to do with it, eh? I seen you huggin' and talkin' and pettin' in corners! So it was you put her up to it, was it? I thought so! That explains a lot, that do. She's not the sort to behave like that unless she were led astray. Did you? Did you, boy? Answer me, blast you!"

"No."

"You need to watch your step, you know."

"I told you I had nothing to do with it."

"Arrh!" Harry Brent glanced at Mutton and jerked his head sideways. "Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, would it?"

Peter climbed down from his perch, flicking the dregs of his tea on to a pile of clinker. He was wide-shouldered and narrow-hipped. He had the physique of a Mediterranean race, lithe, lean, and with natural grace. His eyes were brown, yellow-flecked, filled with intelligence and, to the three older men gathered round the furnace door, the promise of all kinds of foreign wickedness.

Had Peter known, he closely resembled his father, a dark seaman from the port of Vigo in Spain. But he had never seen his father and whenever he asked his mother about him she shut him up, having spent her life trying to forget the bitterness of having known and lost such a man in a matter of forty-eight hours.

Peter said sombrely to Harry Brent, "Mary told you she wanted to go. She asked you to let her, time and time again, but you wouldn't have it. I don't see what call you've got to act so surprised and indignant. All you got was what you asked for."

Old Brent spluttered. "I'll have a bit of respect from you, by damn! Talkin' to me like that, a young gutter-rat who ought by rights to be in gaol! One more word out of you, Roberts, an' I'll have to be seeing Mr. Davies. I'm warnin' you!"

Silence. Charley Agate fiddled with the handle of a coal-slice, withdrawn like a human winkle into a shell of embarrassment. Arthur Mutton stared at his nickel-plated watch with hypocritical interest. The motorist in Lanyon had his hand on the horn button and was keeping it there. Peter said nothing for several seconds while he fought down a wave of murderous fury; then, through clenched teeth, he muttered, "Go to hell, you old goat!" and left the stokehold.

The *Hyacinth* picked up the infuriated motorist in Lanyon and ferried him over to Sittaford. After that she "chuntered" backwards and forwards across the estuary with her thin autumn loads getting thinner still as daylight faded. At nine o'clock she was lying unattended by the Lanyon slip, having had no passengers of any kind for the best part of half an hour. A horn sounded, and a

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few minutes later the crew clumped unwillingly out of the public bar of the Ferry Inn, Harry Brent leading and Peter Roberts, like an outcast, bringing up the rear.

There were four vehicles waiting on the slip. One was a large long-distance lorry, loaded with drums of electrical cable. As well, there was a thirty-two-seater motor coach and a ramshackle furniture van, and on the sides of both of these were painted the words THE WANDERERS—*A Vagabond Theatrical Company, Presented by Timothy Ruddock.* The fourth vehicle was a private car—newish, painted black, and as ordinary as a daily newspaper.

In the estuary the tide had turned. It was now on the ebb and with the change the waves had become white-tipped, a rare thing to see so far up-river.

At the top of the slipway Harry Brent paused, looking downstream, with the wind flapping the lapels of his reefer jacket and the rain dripping off the peak of his cap. He stuck his thin nose into the wind and sniffed. Feeling the same wind slicing through his clothes, Peter Roberts knew intuitively what was going on in the old man's mind. He had had to put up with a second series of surly questions about Mary Brent's disappearance while in the pub. Sullen with anger and injured innocence, and knowing the words would go to feed the old man's doubts, Peter said wickedly, " I don't reckon we ought to take this lot over—not on one chain, not in this weather."

Old Brent swung round, cold-eyed. " What the hell do you think you know about it? " he screeched viciously. " How long've you been on this job, boy? Twelve month? Well, I been at it thirty year."

" The tide's turned," Peter said woodenly. " She'll bump like hell in the middle."

" That shows how much you know! The load'll bear her down."

" You mean the chain will, gaffer—if it holds."

Brent screamed, " Damn 'ee, and don't call me gaffer; I'm yer skipper, not a ruddy farmer! Get down below where you belong, ye young beggar, and stop telling me my job or I'll not have you on the boat."

A tall man with greying hair carefully cut and waved, and wearing an imitation camel-hair overcoat belted at the waist, had left the coach and crossed to join them in time to hear half of the argument. He interrupted. " Forgive me. I'm Timothy Ruddock and I'm the producer of the Wanderers company." His voice was light. He spoke selfconsciously, enunciating his words with an actor's emphasis. " We've an engagement in Yeovil tomorrow. I do hope there'll be no trouble about getting us across because I want my people to get some sleep."

" Don't 'ee fret, sir," Brent said. " We'll get 'ee across for sartin." He had a special voice with an exaggerated West Country accent that he reserved for use with tourists whom he thought good for a tip or a pint of beer. He was using it now and it sliced across Peter Roberts's nerves like a hair drawn through a finger cut.

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" I've sarved this ferry thirty year, come good weather, come bad," the old man was blethering. " We have a broken chain, ye see, but then I've yet to see two chains break in the one day. 'Tis most unlikely." He turned on Peter again. " I thought I told 'ee to get aboard, damn 'ee! "

Peter said, " There's a four-knot tide running." He had started the argument wantonly, but now he knew, or felt, that there really was danger, and his voice was flat and urgent. " Send 'em round by road, you old fool. It's not worth the risk."

Harry Brent gibbered at him, speechless with anger. Ruddock, who had been turning up his coat collar against the wind, smiled falsely at Peter. " It *is* a dirty night, isn't it? "

" As dirty as I've ever seen on this estuary and looks like getting dirtier."

" It wouldn't be, perhaps, that you want to get home to bed, dear boy, and that's why you're trying to persuade the skipper not to take us across? "

" Look," Peter said venomously, " you don't know what the hell you're talking about, mister. I happen to live on the other side of this ruddy great river. But since you're set on going I reckon you better go. If a chain breaks it's your look-out."

He paused, contemptuously eyeing the actor from suede shoes to well-waved hair. " Why don't you go and powder your nose? " he snarled and walked away. Harry Brent's voice, braying anger, followed him, but he pretended not to hear.

The *Hyacinth* set out from Lanyon with the four vehicles aboard her. Because of the pull of the tide her single chain stretched itself downstream in a shallow arc as her weight came to bear upon it.

In the cable-lorry the driver, Passmore, was reading the football news in a crumpled copy of a morning newspaper. He was a Yorkshireman, stolid, conscientious, earnest, and unimaginative.

In the Wanderers' coach the company were passing the time in their various ways. Ruddock was telling Donald Buxton, the juvenile lead, about the squabble on the slipway, his voice histrionic with outrage. Buxton was listening with only half an ear because, as usual, he was thinking about motor-cars, which were an obsession with him. His obsession was useful to Ruddock because Buxton had agreed to become the unpaid driver of the coach after the proper driver had been taken ill early in the tour.

Farther up the coach Ma Henderson, the character woman, was snoring, with her head back, her mouth open, and her strong fat hands clasped warily over her outsize handbag. Beside her, Daphne Portland, the leading lady, a plain girl of twenty-eight with a passion for the theatre, was writing to her husband . . . *Two last days in Yeovil, darling, and then London, and you ! Goodness me, I shall be glad when it's over. I haven't grumbled much before because it seemed dreary, but this company really ought to be wrapped up and posted somewhere. If I take the slightest notice of Tim Ruddock in rehearsal I find myself moving like a sea-cow and chirping like a tweetie-bird. He is the world's worst director* . . .

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John Maxted, the long-faced and melancholy character man, was suffering. He had stomach trouble and a passion for fried food and, as a combination, the two things were difficult to live with. Paradoxically, he was, on the stage, a brilliant comedian.

Near the front of the coach the two assistant stage managers, Nancy Smith and Roderick Delabole, aged eighteen and twenty respectively, grossly underpaid and overworked, were happily holding hands and planning to get themselves parts in a London production.

In the private car outside, sandwiched between the bulk of the cable-lorry on one side and the Wanderers' scenery van on the other, John Armstrong, an Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and a bachelor, taking a late fishing holiday, was sitting in the darkness with the radio on, listening to Brahms and trying not to think. That was what he was on holiday for—not to think.

Once the *Hyacinth* was thirty yards out from the Lanyon shore Harry Brent slammed the engine-room-telegraph lever over to FULL from HALF AHEAD. Its bell rang loudly in the engine-room. Peter Roberts glanced at the indicator with hatred and fed more steam to the engine. Then he returned to the angry thoughts that were leaping and tumbling in his mind, like acrobats, released after weeks of suppression. He was making promises to himself. They were no more than fantasies, and he knew it, but they served, like drink, to take the edge off his misery and restlessness. Or he thought they did . . .

The old deadbeat! One more sneer, and I'm off! Just let him try it, he'll see. He'll find himself short of an engineer. One more hint, for that matter, that I had anything to do with Mary going; that'll be enough. And if the old woman starts up—which she will, trust her—then that's that. I'll damn well run for it! Go to London. Sign on with a foreigner. Ditch the lot. Get away from the whole ruddy boiling. If I can't get a berth without my passport and union card, then I'll stow away . . .

The anger-voice went on and on, seeming to come more from his belly than his head. He listened to it as if it were a wise and trusted friend. When it faltered he encouraged it, willing it to go on. It was glad to oblige. Dead end of a job! I'd be better off in gaol . . . Fancy being on a ship again! Call my soul my own. Think of it, New York, Panama, Valparaiso—what a proper old do I had in Valparaiso last time, by hell!

The thoughts came faster and faster and more and more wildly; they swept effortlessly round the world from Valparaiso to Hawaii to Brisbane—what wouldn't I give for a night on that Aussie beer again?—to Durban, Port Said, Naples, Marseilles, and Lisbon, travelling in the polished and functional modernity of the engine-room of a twenty-thousand-ton tanker, until, like homing pigeons, they returned bitterly to roost in the *Hyacinth*'s engine-room. In midstream by now, the old scow was playing leapfrog with herself, bouncing, veering, and lurching like a toy duck in a bathtub.

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What about it, Mr. Brent, Peter's anger-voice whispered; what if the other chain *were* to go? You'd be in proper trouble and no error, wouldn't you . . .?

With no thought, seemingly, to start it—instinctively, compulsively, like the jerk of the reflex in a knee joint—Peter's right hand yanked down the regulator, cutting off steam, and quickly shoved it up again. The engine faltered in its stride. A shock travelled from the pistons via the crankshaft to the reduction gear and then along the great mainshaft running athwartships until it reached the portside driving-wheel.

Behind the cylinder-heads Peter Roberts stood quite still, waiting, his racing thoughts stilled, holding his breath. A few seconds passed. A new voice spoke in his head: Mad—you must be as mad as a ruddy hatter! Nothing happened. The seconds ticked by, very slowly. Equally slowly, Peter began to relax. He exhaled and drew in a long breath of utter relief.

Then the chain went.

He heard it. He felt it. The engine raced. He slammed down the regulator. He bent his head, with the sweat cooling on his forehead. Had it been his fault? Had it? No answer. He didn't know. It might have been; it might not. He could never know. Oh God!

Arthur Mutton's prissy old voice yelped at him from the hatchway, breaking the spell of horror. "Peter! Give us a hand, boy! Come and give us a hand!"

When the chain parted, the *Hyacinth* hesitated for a moment, ponderous and puzzled, like a circus elephant whose trick has been changed in mid act. Then the wind drove into the slab-sides of her superstructures, working against the tide. She was keel-less and, without her chains, at the mercy of the elements. She started to waltz lumpishly, like a fat dowager duchess, down-river.

Forward, at the Sittaford end—or what should have been the Sittaford end—Harry Brent was struggling to let go the anchor which hung in readiness against the boat's side. It was fitted with a quick-release device which had been painted many, many times during the *Hyacinth*'s thirty years of service. In theory the quick-release should have been operable by hand, but the old man's stiffened fingers were making no headway at all. Peter Roberts arrived with a hammer in his hand, his brain working with the swift clarity that comes in moments of danger. He pushed the old man to one side, leaned over the observation-deck rails and hit the quick-release hard with the hammer. It did not budge. He hit it again with all the strength of his wide shoulders. It gave. Down went the anchor into the water.

The wind took the spray from the top of the splash it made and flung it contemptuously into Peter's face. He raised his arm to wipe the water out of his eyes with the sleeve of his overalls and heard Brent shouting in a cracked voice, "The cable's gone, boy! The cable's gone! What . . ."

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Thirty years of slow rust had eaten into the chain of the anchor cable, working away quietly and undisturbed beneath layer upon layer of white paint. Peter stared for a second at the useless end of chain hanging down the boat's side. Then he turned and ran along the deck towards the stern. He was cold. He could feel the hairs on the back of his neck tingling and he shivered as he ran. Water came foaming over the vehicle deck as he crossed it on his way to the port observation deck and he felt the menacing tug of it round his legs.

A second anchor was mounted aft, in a position diagonally opposite the first. It was secured in the same way. Peter struck hard at the quick-release with the hammer. It gave, first time, and the anchor dropped. A wave of water climbed the boat's side. He watched the cable rattle out of the locker, hold, and tauten. He was soaking wet from the waist down and every time he moved his feet his engineer's sneakers made a soggy, sucking noise on the deck. But he was oblivious of wetness, and of cold now, as he waited with his face as taut as the anchor cable itself.

The cable held.

As soon as the anchor laid hold on her stern the *Hyacinth* stopped pirouetting like a duck with an amputated foot. She took up and held a position with her bows into the wind, facing downstream. Hitherto only an occasional wave had been able to break over the ramps of the vehicle deck, but now every wave was doing so. Ruddock, shouting panickily for information outside the door of the coach, had his feet swept from under him. He clawed at the door handle and saved himself, letting out a wail of terror at the same time. He was still shouting for help as a dozen hands hauled him back into the safety of the coach.

Presently Peter left the observation deck and went in search of Harry Brent. He found him, with Arthur Mutton, huddled in the doorway of the Ladies' Cabin. He frowned. "I got her down."

"Will she hold, do you reckon?"

Peter nodded. He could sense the fear in the two old men and contempt soured in his mouth. Skipper! "I reckon so," he said shortly. "We'll be dragging, I don't doubt, but there's no harm in that so long as we don't drag too fast."

"Yes," Harry Brent said. "Yes, that's right. That's right. Just so long as we don't drag too fast—I—I reckon we'll be all right, don't you, boy?"

"Sure."

"I'm grateful to ye. I wasn't makin' much of a go with that anchor. Thank 'ee, Peter."

The contempt in Peter Roberts died. Its place was taken by a wave of compassion. His anger had spent itself long ago. Now he could feel only compassion and, beneath it, a straining sense of guilt and responsibility. He realized that Harry Brent was too old, too ill, too stiff in the joints—and in the mind—to be able to rise to an emergency of this kind.

It was a thing that had never happened before in the history

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of the ferry service. In theory Harry should have been prepared for it—and perhaps he had, years ago, thought about it once or twice, but not recently. Recently Harry had been thinking of nothing but his rheumatism, his nagging wife, and his pretty, wilful daughter who was an utter mystery to him and a source of sore bewilderment.

As for Arthur Mutton, he was no more than Harry Brent's shadow, older, stupider, even more narrow-minded. Of the two, Peter realized, Harry was the more deserving of compassion; at least he had been something once.

"Why don't you two go down to the stokehold for a bit of a warm?" he suggested gently. "You can't do anything more up here for the time being. Why not get Charley to brew up? We could all do with a hot drink, I reckon."

Brent hesitated. A flash of senile arrogance showed in his eyes and for a moment he scowled at Peter; but then he shivered, facing reality. He rubbed his nose, garnished at the nostrils with tufts of tobacco-stained hair. "Maybe you're right." His voice was low-pitched and husky. "I . . . I s'pose I'm gettin' past this sort o' thing. I don't like to admit it, but there it be."

"It's not the kind of thing a man expects to do at your age, Harry," Peter said.

"No . . . Well, we better get below." The old man left the shelter of the cabin door. "Come on, Arthur." He hesitated, then met Peter's eyes. "I—I should've listened to what you had to say on the slip, boy. I was a bit pig-headed. I apologize—and thank'ee for takin' over, like."

Peter stared at him. In his mind he was back behind the *Hyacinth*'s engine with the regulator in his hand. Had it been his fault? Had it? Ought he to confess it now? No. No, not now. Later, perhaps, but now it would only make things more difficult. He forced a smile to his face.

"That's all right, Harry."

They went, two old men seeming suddenly older, clinging with desperation to every flimsy handhold that offered while the seas foamed round their legs. Peter watched them to the door of the stokehold. Then he turned and fought his way to the driving-cab of the cable-lorry.

A few minutes later he was standing with his back to the door of the Wanderers' coach, rubbing water out of his eyes with a dirty hand. There were ten human beings facing him—Passmore, John Armstrong, seven actors and actresses, and the driver of the furniture van—and their eyes all held anxiety to a greater or lesser degree. Only in John Armstrong was the anxiety so controlled that it appeared to be no more than concern. He and Passmore were soaked to the skin as a result of having had to cross the deck to reach the coach. The scenery-van driver, a little Cockney whom the company called 'Erbert, was dry because he had come to the coach soon after the chain had gone during an interval when the deck had been dry.

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The voices in Peter's head were at it again, arguing about the breaking of the chain. With an immense effort of will he forced them to be silent. What difference did it make? The chain had gone. Neither argument, regrets, nor guilt could alter the fact. He managed to grin. To his surprise he felt the anxiety filling the coach lessen as he did so. He knew he was being depended upon, and the knowledge worked on his self-confidence like strong drink.

He took a deep breath and said, " Look, this is how we stand. Both the chains this old scow works on have gone west. The second one bust only a few minutes ago. We were adrift for a while, but there's an anchor down now. Don't worry, we'll be all right. If anyone in Lanyon or Sittaford saw us go adrift there'll be a tug on its way up from Tawport to take us in tow by now."

John Armstrong was offering him a cigarette. He took it, nodding his thanks. Ruddock said sharply, " And if nobody *did* see the accident? "

" Then we'll be stuck here a bit longer. The next crew's due on duty at midnight; they'll raise the alarm if no one does before."

" Do you think anybody will have noticed, dear? It's very dark." The question came from Ma Henderson. A lifetime in the theatre, always a battle, had given her a shell of fatalism that it would have taken more than the prospect of a night marooned on a ferry-boat to destroy.

Peter liked the look of her, liked the indomitable quality he detected behind the paint and the wrinkles. At least one of the old girl's chins was strong, he decided, and smiled at her as he answered, " I don't know. Fifty-fifty chance, maybe." In fact he knew the chance to be less; the inhabitants of Lanyon and Sittaford wouldn't so much as show their noses at a window on such a night. Even if someone did look out, from Lanyon, say, he would merely assume that the *Hyacinth* was over at Sittaford.

Timothy Ruddock was talking again, his voice filled with patronizing irritation. Peter looked at him narrowly. " That's all very well, dear boy," the producer was saying, " but what you don't seem to realize is that we're booked in Yeovil tomorrow. If we don't get there tonight we shall probably have to cancel and that'll cost us a lot of money. I must say I think it's a scandal that a thing like this should be allowed to happen."

" Look, mister," Peter's voice was calm and cold, " when I was trying to get the skipper to send you round by road you chose to put your oar in. I reckon you can't grumble now; you only got what you asked for."

" Well, I like that! I only . . . Where is the skipper anyway? "

Peter felt responsibility settle like a weight on his shoulders. This was it. This was the moment when he could, if he wanted, crush old Harry Brent utterly—merely by rejecting responsibility. To his surprise, he found the idea unthinkable, and he said to Ruddock, " I'm the skipper for the time being."

" Are you, now? Well, I don't know. I'm not sure I like the sound of that. Is the old man ill or something? "

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" Yes, he's ill." The words were delivered with a bite. Ruddock blinked, taken by surprise. " Sit down and shut up," Peter said. " You're wasting time."

" I'm not going to be ordered about like— "

" Shut up! And sit down! "

Ruddock sat down.

Peter said generally, " What's the time? "

John Armstrong answered, glancing at his watch. " Half past nine."

There was movement at the door of the coach. Peter turned his head to see Charley Agate and Arthur Mutton, laden with assorted cans and pannikins of steaming tea, climb into the vehicle. They were followed by Harry Brent, moving with the steady deliberation of a man in pain.

Mutton said, " Stokehold's flooded. The water would have been in the fire in less than ten minutes. We reckoned it was better to douse it and bring the tea along here, like." He waited.

Peter realized that the old man was waiting for approval. He smiled and said, " Well done, Arthur. Lob out the tea. It'll do everybody good." At the same time he was thinking that there were two and a half hours to go until midnight and that a tug would take half an hour at least to get up the river from Tawport. They had three hours to wait, therefore, in all probability, and during that time the tide would flow faster and faster until it reached the height of the ebb. If the anchor held, they'd be sitting pretty. But if it didn't hold . . .

At any rate, it didn't look as if Ruddock would get his lot to Yeovil much before midday tomorrow. The thought made him grin as he allowed himself a small, wicked satisfaction. Long drink of pond water he was, that Ruddock!

A girl's voice, rising clearly over a murmur of subdued conversation, said, " Pa! Are you all right? "

The words broke the thread of Peter's thought and the voice made him jump with its unexpected familiarity. " Mary! Where the hell have you sprung from? "

Mary Brent came forward from the back of the coach. There was a space there, cleared of seats and now crammed with luggage, theatrical baskets, and dresses and costumes hanging from bars screwed to the roof. " I'm with the company, Peter," she said. " Miss Portland thought she might be able to help me land a job in London and Mr. Ruddock offered me a lift in the coach. I was keeping out of the way for fear of Pa seeing me, but . . . "

Old Brent was staring fixedly at his daughter, holding himself against the movement of the boat by clutching the coat-rack above the seats. Peter turned and looked at him, willing him not to make a row.

The girl said again, " Are you all right, Pa? "

" The pain's bad, Mary," Harry Brent answered. There was no anger in his voice; he was stating a fact, without emotion or even self-pity.

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She said gently, " Got your aspirins? "

He nodded. " Had a couple only half an hour ago . . . or maybe it was a bit longer, I dunno."

" A couple more won't hurt you."

Peter watched. Things to be done were springing one after another into his mind. He was considering them, arranging them in order of priority, but at the same time he was strongly aware of Mary. The sight of her gentleness with her father gave him pleasure. A warmth filled him and reached out beyond Mary to encompass Harry Brent and all the rest of the people aboard the *Hyacinth.*

He let himself enjoy it for a moment, noting that she was dressed in her best clothes—a gay linen frock he had never seen before and a gaberdine waterproof coat. He guessed that she had been to see a girl-friend of hers who was a hairdresser's assistant in Tawport, because her hair was newly cut and washed. It was short, soft, naturally curly hair, in colour halfway between blazing ginger and auburn. Her coat was hanging open and her slimness made her look fragile and delicate. She wasn't. Peter knew that.

She was young, and had been kept at home too much by that silly old mother of hers, but beneath her outer covering of shy gaiety and romanticism he had long ago detected a core of determination and integrity. She was growing. She was warm—a kind, friendly personality. He had thought of her as pretty. Now, without actually phrasing the word in his mind, he was thinking of her as beautiful. Would she be allowed to go to London to try her luck, he wondered, after all this was over? She might. If only it weren't for the old woman . . .

Urgency tapped Peter on the shoulder, jerking his mind away from Mary. He felt the weight of his responsibility again. He looked round the coach. " There's one or two things want doing. I could do with a hand. Anybody willing? "

Passmore, the lorry-driver, nodded. Donald Buxton said, " Certainly." John Armstrong murmured, " I am, but I'm afraid I know very little about ships." 'Erbert, the Cockney van-driver, shouted, " I'll lend a hand, mate."

Peter smiled at Armstrong. " Who said this was a ship? " He nodded at the others. " Two of us'll be enough for now. I may want you later. Thanks for offering."

Mary Brent had made a place for her father with a folded coat for a pillow, and the old man was sitting with his head back, sipping tea from a pannikin she was holding to his lips. Peter went to put his hand on her shoulder. She turned her head quickly at his touch and smiled at him. He said, " Attagirl! All right, Harry? "

" Be all right in a minute, boy. Give us a call if you need help."

Peter nodded. " Sure." He turned and led the way to the door of the coach with Armstrong following. When they were outside in the wet darkness he said, shouting against the wind, " It'll be hard work with just the two of us, but I didn't want more. Shipping water like this it'd be dead easy to lose someone in the drink."

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John Armstrong laughed. They set to work to lash the vehicles to the deck.

With the movement of the *Hyacinth* steadily increasing, the time was near when the brakes might fail to hold them. Peter and Armstrong had to work in the near dark because the water had reached the ship's batteries and the only light now was that shining from the windows of the coach.

The wind howled, the rain lashed, and their half-frozen fingers made a painful labour of the business of tying knots in stiff new rope. Nevertheless, as he worked, Peter started to feel tremendously happy.

It was a wanton, uncontrollable happiness, a rising of the spirit born of the battle they were fighting and made dramatic by the wildness of the night. At one moment, face to face with Armstrong, he saw that the other man, too, was elated. He grinned at him. Armstrong grinned back.

Presently Peter remembered the breaking of the chain. Had it been his fault? His elation faded, but not for long; it was too strong for guilt. The feeling of guilt went as quickly as it had arrived, drowned by a flood of excitement.

They finished lashing the vehicles. Armstrong asked, "What next?"

"We've got to have a bash at winching up the forward ramp a bit higher now," Peter said. "Keep the ruddy water out. Trouble is, there's no steam, so we shall have to do it by hand. It'll be hard labour, I can tell you. You on?"

"I'm on," Armstrong said. "It seems an odd thing to say, but I'm enjoying myself."

"So am I." Peter chuckled. "First time for months, too. Pity about your suit. If only Mother could see me now! Dear Mum, I am writing to you in the bath . . . Watch it, here's a big one coming!"

They managed to winch up the ramp as high as it would possibly go. At a more vertical angle it did a lot, as Peter had hoped it would, to stop the waves from sweeping aboard. But the sea still had power, and when the waves could not get aboard they got under the ramp instead, lifting it and letting it slam down again on its chains. It was obvious that it would not stand the hammer for long, so they manhandled a safety raft from the port observation deck down between the ramp and the superstructure so that it acted as a wedge, and lashed it firmly into place. The ramp was solid after that, and the water flowing over the deck rarely rose above ankle level.

With the ramp secured, Peter went on to tackle the problem of light. They dismounted one of the old-fashioned headlamps from the Wanderers' scenery van and lashed it to the taffrail of the starboard observation deck. Now John Armstrong had his head beneath the bonnet of the cable lorry, connecting the leads from the headlamp to the lorry's battery. Presently he straightened and shouted, "Switch on!"

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On the observation deck above, Peter switched on, using a tumbler switch from the engine-room switchboard. A beam of white light probed out over black water and white spume, picking out the tree-covered north-eastern bank of the estuary. He chose a tall tree as a marker, lined it up with a bit of the *Hyacinth*'s rigging, and started to measure her rate of drift by eye. Armstrong came up to wait silently beside him; he was an imperturbable man, tall and thin, with an ugly, deeply lined face, generously freckled, and a nearly bald head.

Peter grunted. Armstrong said, "Something wrong?"

"No . . . We're dragging the anchor. I thought we should be. I reckon we must have drifted the best part of a mile from Lanyon. That means we've two miles to go yet before we reach open water. We ought to be all right so long as we don't drag any faster."

"How long should we last, out to sea?"

"About twenty minutes," Peter said. Armstrong nodded calmly. Peter grinned at him, knowing that he had been right to give an honest answer; no need to give this bloke the old malarkey. "If we went on the rocks we'd not even last that long," he added. "This old tub's buoyant enough in calm water, but she's not built to be chucked about. I don't mind telling you I'd sooner be out there tonight in a five-foot dinghy."

He swung the headlamp beam so that it played on the western side of the estuary, hoping to spot a house or cottage whose occupants he might alert by flashing the light. There was nothing. He had known there wouldn't be. Between Tawport and Lanyon the estuary was steep-sided and wooded and the authorities would not permit people to build there for fear of spoiling the view. He switched off the light to save the battery.

"If the anchor cable went," Armstrong asked, "would we be certain to be swept out to sea?"

"Not certain, no. We might run ashore. Or, with the tide falling, we could be lucky and go aground on a mud bank."

"You don't sound very confident."

Peter shrugged. "Trouble is, the tide'll tend to keep us in the channel, you see. As for going aground, this old cow only draws two feet of water, so she'd stay afloat in a ruddy duck pond."

Armstrong nodded again. "Is there anything else we can do?"

"Not that I can think of right now. I'm going to stay up here to keep an eye on the drift, but you needn't. Why don't you go and have a bit of a warm in the coach?"

Armstrong shook his head, sitting down with his back to the inboard railings where he was more or less out of the wind. "I'll stay and keep you company." He took a cigarette case from an inside pocket. "Cigarette? Not often you get excitement of this sort in your job, I suppose?"

Peter took a cigarette and said bitterly, "Too right it isn't!"

"Am I to take it from that that you don't like the job?"

"I hate it."

"Why don't you change, then?"

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The red eye of Peter's cigarette glowed fiercely. Why didn't he change! He glanced at Armstrong. He had long ago learnt that it was better to suffer in silence—at school, where his illegitimacy had been a standing joke, in the engine-rooms of the ships he had served in, under arrest and in court at the time of his trouble, working aboard the *Hyacinth* with Harry Brent and Arthur Mutton. Now he was tempted, however. Armstrong was a stranger. In a few hours' time he'd be miles away, which made it safe to talk since his talking could never be thrown back in his face. Should he? The need for understanding battered at his defences. He surrendered.

" I got into trouble," he said slowly. " They put me on probation for three years. Mr. Davies—that's the Probation Officer—found me the job. He won't let me change. I'm an engine-room hand by trade, you see."

" No," Armstrong said gently, " I'm afraid I don't quite see."

Peter switched on the headlamp, played the beam on the shore, then over on to the anchor cable, and switched off. He faced Armstrong again. " I'd rather be on the roads, navvying—anything. I don't spend an hour on this tub without thinking about a proper ship, going foreign and living like a seaman again. Then there's Harry Brent, the skipper, and the others. They think a man's a stranger if he comes from as far away as Tawport. As for Londoners—blimey, they might as well come from Mars! I'm only half English—my father was a Spaniard and he and my ma weren't married." Peter drew on his cigarette, and then sat down, opposite Armstrong, with his back to the taffrail. The rain had stopped for the time being, although the wind was blowing as hard as ever.

" On top of being a stranger and a bastard," Peter added bitterly, " I've been in trouble and I'm on probation. And to crown the lot, Davies went and fixed me up with lodgings with the Brents! You haven't seen the old woman. She's one of these plump old dears with a tongue like the edge of a hacksaw blade. The way she treats that kid, Mary, makes my blood boil."

He paused. " What was the trouble? " Armstrong asked; then smiled. " Only if you want to tell me."

Peter grinned sheepishly. " I made a proper mug of myself, that's what. I was on a big Harriman Line tanker, brand-new. I was sitting pretty, I can tell you. Then we put in to Plymouth for water on the way to the Middle East, and I got a day off and went out and got drunk. There was a big fat slob of a bookie in one of the pubs. He had a flashy little bit of skirt with him. She took my fancy and I started looking at her and giving her the nod, you know. She must have liked it because she came over and asked me to join 'em. At closing-time we went out together and I kissed the girl good night.

" The bookie hadn't said much up to then. I reckoned he was too far gone to care what was going on, but while I had my arms round his girl he came up and kicked me. There was a bit of an

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argument and he finished by hitting the girl, so I let him have one that laid him out proper. We carried him to his car, which was parked near the pub, and I took the ignition keys and gave 'em to the landlord so's the bookie wouldn't get pinched for being drunk in charge. Then the girl said she didn't want to stay with him, she wanted to come with me . . .

Well, to cut a long story short, we went dancing. She'd taken a bottle of whisky from the bookie's car and in the end I passed out. I woke up on the early-morning train to London. My ship had sailed by that time . . . "

He paused. He flicked the stub of his cigarette away angrily and watched the curve and fall of its red spot of light in the darkness. " I stayed with the girl—Lily, she was called—for three or four days in a flat in Maida Vale that belonged to a friend of hers. I kept on wanting to go down to the Harriman Line offices to try to get myself in the clear about jumping my ship, but Lily persuaded me not to. She had plenty of money, she said, and I wasn't to bother. I suppose I was windy—didn't want to face the music, like—so I let her have her way. Isn't all this boring you? "

Armstrong shook his head. " No."

" Well," Peter said quietly, " it ended one evening when she asked me to get a packet of fags from her bag. There was a man's wallet in the bag. I tumbled to it then. The wallet was the bookie's and I reckon she whipped it while I was giving the ignition keys to the landlord of the boozer. That's where all the money'd been coming from. I ought to have guessed, but I didn't—honestly I didn't."

He rose to his feet and worked the headlamp again. " Still dragging, but no faster, so far as I can see."

" Go on. What happened next? "

" Can't you guess? I went to the Harriman Line offices. They kept me waiting. They were phoning for the coppers. I was taken in and booked for robbery with violence. Like a mug I said nothing about Lily until it was too late—when they went to the flat she'd skipped. I had six weeks in clink on remand, waiting for the Quarter Sessions. When I came up I told the judge I'd helped Lily spend the money, but hadn't known where it came from. There were witnesses from the pub to say that the bookie had kicked me first and the landlord told about me giving him the car keys. I reckon it was that that saved my bacon. Anyway, the beak took a long time to make up his mind but in the end he said he'd decided to believe me. He gave me a proper wigging and said he was going to let me off with three years on probation and that I was to think myself lucky . . . "

" You were. You can get up to fourteen years for robbery with violence."

Peter glanced curiously at Armstrong. " You a lawyer or something? "

" No, but I know quite a lot about the law."

" Oh. Well, anyway, there it is and here I am. I've got two

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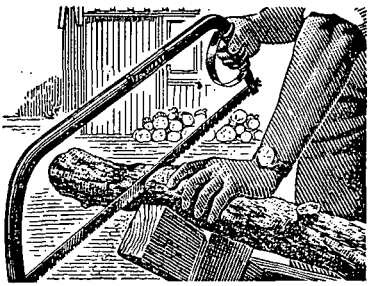

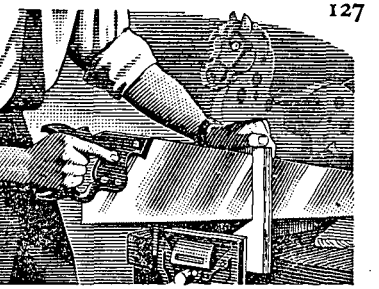

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years to go. I reckon this old tub's liable to drive me into the loony bin, long before two years is up."

"It won't," Armstrong said.

"No, I know, but—"

The *Hyacinth* lurched. Her bows dipped. A mass of water came flooding over the forward ramp and foamed across the deck, sucking and gobbling at the wheels of the vehicles. Peter leaped to his feet and switched on the headlamp.

The anchor cable was as taut as a bowstring. He swung the light shorewards and watched. "We've stopped dragging!" Back went the beam to the anchor cable. "The hook must have foulec an old mooring," Peter muttered. "During the slump they laid up shipping all along the estuary and afterwards they left most of the ruddy moorings on the bottom."

Armstrong said, "Well, that's a good thing. Now there's no risk of our dragging too fast."

The boat had started to veer from side to side, with a movement resembling that of a kite held low in a fresh wind. Peter was staring at the ripple made by the water as it flowed past the anchor cable. He had never seen a faster running tide. "I'd rather we were dragging," he said. "A bit of movement doesn't do any harm and it takes some of the strain off the cable."

John Armstrong lit a cigarette and passed it to Peter. He lit a second for himself and they stood side by side in silence, watching. It seemed to Peter that he could feel the tension in the cable; as if it was his muscles that were bearing the weight of the *Hyacinth*—nearly four hundred tons—against the inexorable tug of a five-knot tide. The sense of relief he had been feeling while he was telling his story to John Armstrong had gone utterly. He was feeling guilty again. The voices in his head had begun to argue. Had it been his fault—or partly his fault—or not his fault at all?

He still did not know when the anchor cable parted, beneath the surface of the water, ten minutes later.

"Listen to me, all of you!" Peter shouted; and every head in the coach turned in his direction. "We're adrift," he went on, making his voice even and undramatic now that he had everybody's attention. "The situation's a bit chancy, but that doesn't mean we'll not get out of it. Don't start talking—there isn't time."

He turned to the lorry-driver, Passmore. "That's marine telegraph cable you're carrying, isn't it?"

"Yes, mate." The Yorkshire voice was slow. "Why?"

"Because we're going to need it. If we don't get some kind of an anchor down we're liable to be swept out to sea. There's nothing else aboard strong enough to hold us. We're going to pay out enough cable to hitch your bus to the ship with double lengths of twenty fathoms apiece . . ."

"You mean, run my vehicle overboard for the sake of making an anchor?"

"That's right."

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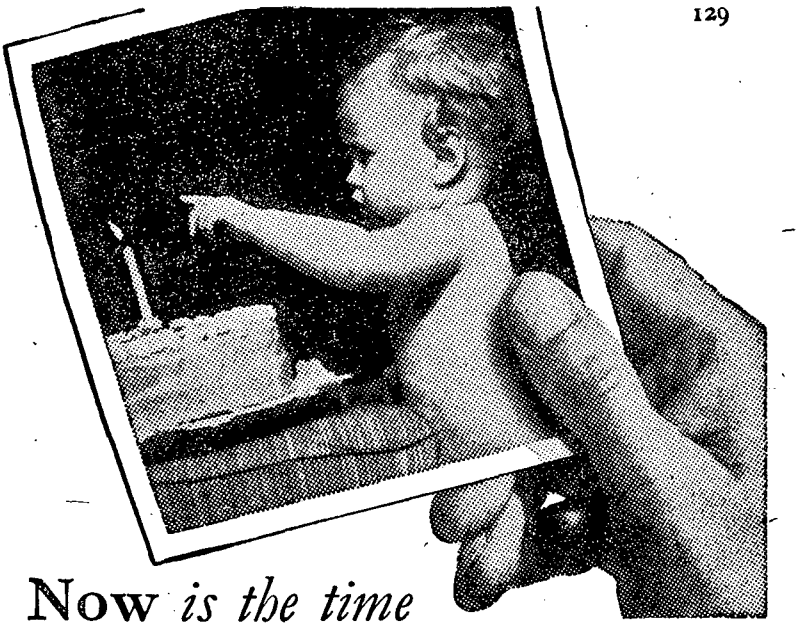

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"You're barmy, lad! That load's worth thousands of pounds, let alone the value of the lorry."

"I dare say, but it can't be helped. If we don't do it you stand to lose your vehicle and your life into the bargain, so don't argue."

"What do you mean, don't argue! I'm arguin'!" Passmore's voice was stolidly furious. "I'm not going to stand by and—"

Peter said, "Be quiet! It's got to be done. I say it's got to be done. If you get in the way I shall have to knock you out and tie you up, mate, so don't start anything."

The Yorkshireman stared at Peter Roberts, eyes narrowed. A second or two passed in utter silence. Then Passmore shrugged sourly. "All right, get on with it, then. But I'm holding you responsible and you'll get no help from me."

Peter nodded. He looked up at the tense faces behind the Yorkshireman. "All the men outside!" There was a quarter-deck bite in his voice. "The ladies can stay here for the time being—you, too, Harry. Mary love, would you mind working a light for us, so's we can see what we're up to?"

Mary Brent was smiling and her eyes were shining. "Anything, Peter," she said. "Anything I can do to help."

Peter turned and jerked his head towards the door. The men moved, Timothy Ruddock and old Arthur Mutton with reluctance, Charley Agate resignedly, the others with nervous eagerness. Passmore stayed where he was.

It was pitch dark on deck, for the night seemed to have the ability to smother the pale light coming from the coach windows. Without an anchor the boat was waltzing crazily and from time to time a wave would come over the stern ramp with power enough to sweep a man off his feet.

Ruddock hesitated at the coach door and said, "My God!" Then someone gave him a shove from behind and he stumbled forward into the darkness.

One of the cable drums had to be lifted and a shaft passed through the hole in its centre. The drum weighed several hundredweight. For a shaft, Peter dug out a steel connecting-rod from among the engine-room spares.

They managed to move one drum forward and another backward, making room for the shaft to be passed through the first. Then they had to hold the drum in the air for long enough to enable Charley Agate to put blocks under the shaft on both sides.

They managed it. Donald Buxton worked like a madman. Maxted, weak and ill, was useless and was sent back to the coach. The little Cockney van-driver used his small strength with intelligence and made himself more useful than a man twice his size. Timothy Ruddock worked with the frantic desperation of a badly frightened man. But it was Peter and John Armstrong who made the thing possible; they worked as a team, needing no words for understanding, and together seemed to have the strength of four men.

The cable was unwound from the drum while minute after

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minute ticked relentlessly by. From time to time Mary Brent swung the headlamp beam away from the work and played it on the shore, shouting their position to Peter. Twice work was stopped because it seemed certain that the *Hyacinth* was going ashore, but each time the tide held her in the channel. On three occasions they felt her touch bottom, but because she was gyrating, the mud had no chance to take hold and each time she drifted off into deeper water.

Charley Agate cut the cable into twenty-fathom lengths with a hacksaw as it came off the drum. Peter Roberts then left the crew on the lorry to Armstrong to supervise, and started to tie the knots that were to fasten the cable to the main structure of the boat and to the lorry's chassis. Even using a big adjustable wrench, he had to strain and sweat to bend the cable into knots, tearing his hands and constantly being knocked half off his feet by waves sweeping over the deck. While he was labouring over the second knot he became aware of someone standing beside him. It was Passmore.

Peter grinned at the big Yorkshireman and Passmore smiled stiffly back.

In all, Peter and Passmore tied eight knots in the three-quarter-inch cable. As they finished the last of them Mary shouted from the observation deck that she could see the lights of Tawport. Peter said to Passmore, " If we can attract attention we may be able to save your bus. Don't reckon on it, though."

He went up to the observation deck and swung the headlamp so that it pointed at the town, lying nearly two miles away from them down a branch in the estuary. He started to flash slow SOS signals in Morse. Then, in the darkness below, Donald Buxton tripped over the wires leading to the lorry's battery and the headlamp went out. John Armstrong's voice broke a tense silence, " You clumsy idiot! No, don't try to put them back! Shift them over to the coach battery."

Peter waited above. Someone came out onto the deck of a big ship moored half a mile away. He was carrying a torch and the light from it flickered backwards and forwards, towards them, away from them, over the side of the ship. Peter yelled, " Shout, all of you! Shout for your ruddy lives! "

They shouted. The wind took their voices and broke them into whispers. The man with the torch on the big ship lost interest and went below again.

Peter scrambled down to the vehicle deck. Passmore was waiting by the door of the lorry's driving-cab. Peter said, " No go. We shall have to ditch her. If we wait it could be too late."

" All right. She's my bus. I'll be the one that ditches her."

The lorry's diesel engine first rumbled, then roared. Buxton had managed to reconnect the leads of the headlamp, using the coach's battery, and Mary was shining the light down on to the vehicle deck. Peter went to stand by the open wire gates at the *Hyacinth*'s stern. The cable-lorry started to move backwards. Passmore was standing on the running-board with the door open

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and one foot on the accelerator pedal. When the rear wheels of the vehicle were already on the ramp he jammed the accelerator down and jumped. The lorry seemed to leap backwards.

At the end of the ramp it tilted, hanging for an instant in mid air. By the light from the headlamp those aboard were able to catch a brief, photographic glimpse of a massive crankcase, propeller-shaft, and twin rear-axles. Then it sank, bubbling and foaming, and the lengths of cable paid out like angry snakes behind it. The cables tautened. They held.

Peter Roberts leaned back against a bulkhead. He was for a moment shaken by sheer physical weariness, so that his hands trembled, while his shoulders seemed to be made of lead and his knees of water. He closed his eyes. As soon as his hands had stopped trembling he opened his eyes again. There was more to be done. He straightened himself and shouted, "Everybody get off the deck! Pack yourselves into the cabins! Get the women out of the coach."

He ran up to the observation deck and took over the headlamp from Mary. He directed the beam at the foot of a headland three hundred yards away; it barely reached so far but it gave light enough for them to detect the vast white tablecloths of foam that the seas were throwing over the rocks.

Armstrong came up to join them. "They're all in one or other of the cabins," he said. "Pretty wet, but safe enough. Our actor friend's yelping about his scenery and costumes."

Peter pointed at the headland. "Cambeak Head. We didn't leave much time to spare. We're right at the mouth of the river." He elevated the light until the beam was pointing at a hut, dimly visible as a rectangular silhouette against an iron-grey, cloud-wracked sky. "Coastguards." He started to flash SOS again. A moment later a light flashed in answer from the hut.

"Wait!" Peter said. "Listen!"

"What for?"

"Quiet! Just listen."

They listened. After an eternity of silent waiting, which must have lasted four or five minutes, there came the sound of three sharp reports. Then Peter grinned. "Maroons," he yelled. "In Tawport. That's the way they get the lifeboat crew out of bed."

Mary said, "How long will it take them to get here, Peter?"

"I believe they reckon to have her all set to go out in six minutes. Say ten, to be on the safe side—and fifteen more to find us. Half an hour maybe."

"Can we live in this for half an hour?" Armstrong asked.

"Yes . . . if those cables hold. Usually it's the weight of the anchor chain that holds a ship, you know, not the anchor itself. In our case the lorry's holding and the cables are doing the work. But I expect they'll hold and so long as we can stay head into wind we shan't be so badly off."

The seas were pounding the *Hyacinth*. Waves ten times as big as the worst they had encountered in the estuary were reaching

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under the boat, lifting her and letting her fall with a sickening, belly-wrenching swoop in time for their successors to break into a chaos of green-and-white water over the forward ramp and the ends of the superstructures. Peter shone the light forward and they watched for a few moments.

The power and fury of the sea were terrifying. Mary said, "Turn the light away, Peter. It frightens me." He turned it aft. The cables were holding.

On the vehicle deck the vehicles were lurching and swaying and the noise of the creaking of their lashings could be heard now and again above the howl of the wind.

Peter said, "Get below, Mary love. Be careful."

Mary shook her head. "I want to be with you."

"What about Harry?"

"I want to be with you."

Peter hesitated. Then, because it seemed to him that she would be as safe with him as she would in the cabins, if wetter, he nodded. "All right. But hang on, now. Don't let go of the rail, will you?"

"No, Peter."

John Armstrong touched him on the arm. "Listen! I'm a policeman—can you hear me?"

"Yes. You, a copper!"

Armstrong chuckled. "Copper's the word, although I never had to pound any pavements. I'm an Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Look, I mean to put in a word for you with the probation people, get you a proper job—as a reward for what you've done tonight. Did you get that?"

Peter said nothing. He felt Mary's hand grip his forearm. Armstrong bent forward, shouting in the teeth of the gale, "Did you hear what I said?"

"I heard." Peter's face was contorted. "Thank you. I don't deserve it." He turned away, looking towards the sea fury at the bows. The inner voices were deafening him. *Tell him—tell him now—No, don't tell him! Keep quiet, you mug. Who's to know?—Tell him! If you don't now you never will.*

He swung round. "I think I might have been the cause of the chain breaking."

"What?" Armstrong shouted. "I didn't hear."

"I jerked the regulator . . . made the engine hesitate, like . . . about half a minute before the chain went. Could have been that that bust it. I didn't know what I was doing." Mary was tugging, tugging at his sleeve. He wouldn't look at her. "Did you hear what I was saying?"

"No," Armstrong shouted. "Something about the chain breaking. What chain? Did you mean the anchor cable? Does it matter? Won't it keep?"

Peter looked at Mary. Her eyes were imploring him. He rubbed his face viciously with the back of his clenched fist. He turned to Armstrong again. "*I said I might have been responsible for the driving-chain breaking!*"

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The policeman's expression did not change. Peter groaned, "Oh, what the hell!" He turned away.

The coastguards were signalling from their hut, using Morse code with an Aldis lamp. Peter watched the flashes of light numbly for a while, then turned again to Armstrong. "They're signalling. Can you read their Morse? All I know is SOS."

Armstrong shook his head.

Peter looked into Mary's face. Her soft red hair, neat and beautiful an hour before, was clinging in rats' tails to her head and brow. Her lips were parted and her eyes were agonized with love and anxiety. He wanted to shout at her. He wanted to slap her. He turned away again and gripped the railing on either side of the headlamp so hard that it seemed as if his fingers ought to cut into the weathered brown wood.

A freak wave crashed over the bows, carrying away the loading-ramp. On the vehicle deck the Wanderers' scenery van tilted crazily and toppled over onto its side. John Armstrong's car, broken from its lashings by the movement of the van, was swept overboard as if it were a plastic toy.

The need to act, to do something became too strong for Peter. He had to stop thinking. The knowledge was growing in him that the *Hyacinth* was doomed. She was going; the only thing was, how soon? Before or after the lifeboat reached them? He was careless of death himself, but there was Mary—and the people huddled in the cabins below, and Armstrong, and Mary, and Mary, and Mary . . .

He grabbed at an excuse to act. "We better try to save that raft we used to wedge the ramp! We may need it. I said, we may need it!"

Armstrong nodded, his lips forming words that the wind made soundless. Peter clawed his way forward along the deck. Armstrong followed and so did Mary. Armstrong signalled her back, but she shook her head.

At the end of the deck Peter lay down and reached out to grasp the ropes that lashed the raft to the superstructure. He had his pocket-knife gripped between his teeth and he used his free hand for an instant in order to slash the knife across the lashings. John Armstrong reached down from behind him and Peter passed the ends of the rope to him to hold while he wriggled sideways in order to repeat the process at the other end of the raft. While he struggled to cut the second set of lashings he heard Armstrong shout, "Watch it! There's a big one coming," and he looked up into a vertical wall of green water.

The wave crashed over the vehicle deck, picking up the scenery van as if it were driftwood and jamming it sideways across the stern gates. Its crest broke clean over the port superstructure.

Peter felt the safety raft lift, and the ropes he was holding were torn from his hand, abrading the skin. He himself was lifted bodily and swept backwards, rolling over and over. In a remarkable way he remained completely conscious of what was happening and

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could feel even the sting of the salt water on his grazed hand as he was tumbled towards the stern. He was flung hard against a stanchion. He snatched at it, got a grip, and held on with all his strength, and when the water had drained off the deck he raised himself groggily to his feet.

Neither Mary nor Armstrong were anywhere to be seen. He lurched towards the headlamp, miraculously still shining out over the water. He pointed it downwards so that it made a circle of light on the water under the lee of the *Hyacinth*'s bulk. He saw the safety raft, afloat about fifteen yards from the boat's side. He saw Mary struggling towards the raft and watched her reach it. Then, not far away, he saw a black hump on the surface and realized that it was Armstrong, floating face downwards, temporarily supported by the buoyancy of the air in his clothes.

The thought of the others in the cabins below flashed through Peter's mind, but only for a split second. They would either live until the lifeboat took them off, or die if the *Hyacinth* broke up before it arrived. He was powerless to do more for them, but not for John Armstrong—nor Mary. He shouted wildly, "Mary! Mary! Hold on! Mary love, hold on!" She couldn't have heard him.

He vaulted the taffrail and fell, feet first, feeling no chill when the sea enveloped him.

He surfaced and trod water. He identified the low, dark outline of the raft and was able to pick out the shape of Mary's head bobbing beside it. He had to search then, for a full half minute, before he caught a glimpse of Armstrong's semi-submerged body, lifted into view for an instant on the crest of a wave.

When Peter reached Armstrong he turned the policeman over on his back and grasped him under the armpits. Then he started to swim backwards in the direction of the raft. Had it not meant leaving Mary he would have made for the boat, which was nearer, but his mind—or his heart—rejected the idea as if it were sacrilege. He managed to ease his shoes off his feet and kicked hard and rhythmically. But the sodden weight of Armstrong's inert body was tremendous; it felt as if he were trying to pull a great mass of seaweed away from its strong anchorage on the rocks. He started to breathe laboriously and the muscles of his legs began to ache with an intensity that almost forced him to stop and rest.

He did not stop. He kicked and kicked and tugged, breathing air in huge gulps which were still insufficient to lessen the pounding of his heart. When a wave caught him by surprise and he inhaled a lungful of water he had to stop swimming and cough and sob for breath, while the conviction that he was going to drown arrived to make his heart beat harder and his lungs yearn for air even more clamorously.

He started to swim again—painfully, still retching from the water in his lungs. And then, suddenly, his mind cleared and quickened. The fear of drowning went. The ache in his legs and arms no longer seemed intolerable, only there, to be accepted and

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endured. He began to breathe in long, deep, steady inhalations which reached right down past his lungs and quietened the animal desperation for air that he had been feeling a few moments before.

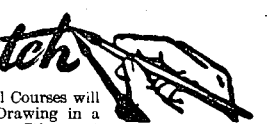
He remembered his guilt about the chain breaking and wondered how he could have felt it so strongly. His guilt had been baseless; he knew it, all of a sudden, quite simply, and without doubt. The chain had been going to break anyway. The engine's hesitation had been no more than a fleabite of strain in comparison with the successive moments of tremendous tension imposed upon the chain by the lurching and weaving of the hull. That was that. Guilt drained out of him, and he knew, again without doubt, that it would never return.

Presently he trod water for a while, resting and getting his bearings, and then rolled over on his back, and set off again in the direction of the raft. It had seemed to be miles away while he was treading water. He realized that it was drifting away from him almost as fast as he was swimming towards it. Yet he was going to reach it—unless his heart burst in the attempt. This was another thing that he knew.

His thoughts turned to Mary Brent. He swam automatically, leaving the working of his lungs and his muscles to instinct, and he filled his mind with the thought of Mary. In a remarkable way it seemed as if he could see as clearly into her mind as into his own. He now realized that she had been running away, not from

I WISH I COULD

Sketch



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her parents, nor from the stultifying life of a minute village, but from him, Peter Roberts. *He* had been the cause of her flight to London. He knew as well that when she had first talked of going, months earlier, she had not meant to go at all, but had wanted only to force his hand.

When she had discussed it with him it had been as if she were talking in code, saying, " I love you, Peter. I want to know whether you love me—or not. If I'm not told soon I shall have to go away. I shall have to go away and leave you because I can't stand not knowing, and if I was two hundred miles away I might not be so terribly unhappy . . . "

The struggle to reach the raft became more and more difficult. Because the air was steadily escaping from John Armstrong's clothing his body was becoming heavier. In order to keep swimming and to counteract the greater weight of his burden, Peter had to reach deeply for his last reserves of strength. He knew that they were his last reserves, and that time was running out for him—and for Armstrong, unless the policeman was already dead. He found himself accepting these things with the same calmness and clarity as he had felt when thinking of Mary. Wonder at his own mental tranquillity made him remember the stories of how drowning men see their lives before them at the moment of death. Was this the same thing, or the beginning of it?

Peter went on swimming. He became conscious of Mary's presence in the water near him. It was a strange feeling. He could not see her nor hear her nor feel her, but she was there, and it was as if she were a magnet, drawing him towards the raft. He drew strength from his need to see her, touch her, and talk to her. Nothing in his life had ever compared in importance with the need to tell Mary that he loved her and that she no longer needed to fly to London to escape the torture of his friendly indifference.

He felt the back of his head bump into something hard. He knew it was the raft. He turned and grabbed one of the loops of cord hanging from the side. He saw Mary work her way along the raft towards him, and felt the weight of Armstrong's body lessen as she took hold of it. He smiled at her. Together they struggled to get the policeman's body out of the water and up onto the raft.

As soon as it was over, Peter's clarity of thought left him as if someone had turned a switch in his brain. He felt panic flooding into his mind and he clung to the loops of cord desperately, his legs inert in the water, his chest heaving, and waves of nausea rising and falling in his throat. Mary put an arm round his body below his shoulders and helped to support him.

They had drifted far away from the pool of light cast by the headlamp on the *Hyacinth*. The lifeboat came, its masthead lights dipping and curvetting like red and green phosphorescent birds in the darkness and its searchlight reaching forward like a probing finger. They watched it draw alongside the black hulk of the *Hyacinth* and, a few minutes later, draw away again.

Peter said, " Shout! Shout, Mary, as hard as you can! "

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They shouted. The lifeboat searchlight swung backwards and forwards, quartering the darkness between them and the *Hyacinth.*

" They'll find us," Peter whispered. " Don't worry. They'll go on until they find us. They won't leave us. Don't worry, Mary darling. They'll find us."

Half a minute later the searchlight beam picked up the raft, swung past it, faltered, and returned. The lifeboat came alongside and arms reached down to pull them out of the sea.

Peter was last aboard. He supported himself by hanging on to the cabin hatch-coaming and looked at the bearded coxswain.

" Did you get 'em all off? "

" That we did."

" What—what about the *Hyacinth* ? "

" She'm a goner, boy. She'll not last out the hour."

Peter nodded. As he let himself be half led, half carried below into the tiny cabin packed with bodies, he was thinking that he would never see the engine-room of the *Hyacinth* again. He was astonished that he could feel so saddened by the thought.

They put him on a bunk beside Armstrong. " Are you feeling all right, sir? " he asked.

John Armstrong smiled. " Not too bad. How are you? "

" I'm fine." Peter took a cup of hot cocoa from one of the lifeboat crew and held it between his chilled hands, blanched and puffy from long immersion in salt water. He waited for a moment, then said, " You told me you meant to speak up for me with the probation authorities . . . "

" Don't worry, I'm going to," Armstrong said. " Although I doubt if it'll be necessary. You're liable to find yourself with a medal once all this has got out, I should think."

" To hell with the medals," Peter said quietly. " I want a seagoing job and . . . "

" And? "

" I want permission to get married."

" To Mary? The girl on the raft? "

" Yes, if she'll have me."

John Armstrong said, " I think that would be a very good thing. Ask her, Peter. Don't worry about the permission; I'll get it for you. That's a promise."

" Thank you," Peter said. He grinned. " I knew I did right to get you onto that raft." John Armstrong laughed.

Peter stood up. Mary was sitting beside her father on the far side of the cabin. He pushed his way towards her.

When she saw him coming she smiled and her eyes shone. Peter smiled back, his heart beating like a drum and happiness hard in his throat as if it were a solid object. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

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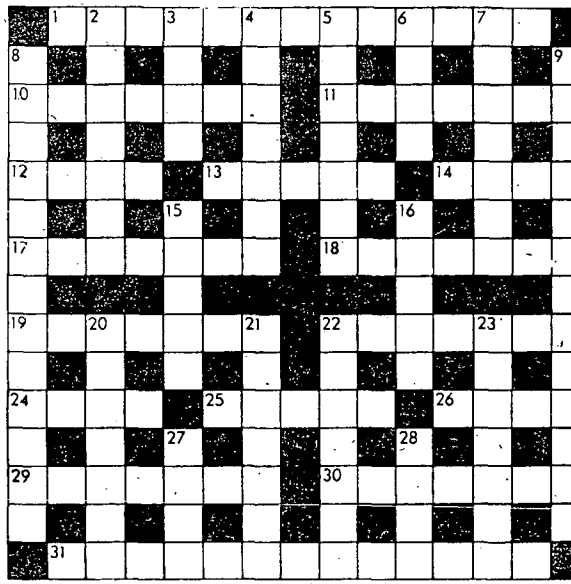
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 99

★



CLUES

Across

1 Master's lost his (8-5).

10 Steeper than I'll climb (3-4).

11 Catcalls? No, poetic inspiration (3, 4).

12 Marches on its stomach (4).

13 Pagan's is outworn, said Wordsworth (5).

14 Highland steer (4).

17 Get rid of (7).

18 Can be legal or illegal (7).

19 Drink that makes the heart grow fonder! (7).

22 3 and good King Wenceslas did, no doubt (7).

24 "There's a great —— in Galatians" Browning (4).

25 Beefy brute (5).

26 Sweet day for a meeting (4).

29 Join up i.e. tuner (7).

30 Approval ends in inspection (7).

31 No buses from here to Mandalay (4, 2, 7).

Down

2 His must be a twisted neck (7).

3 Shirts are this dry now (4).

4 Poorly raised loaf? (3-4).

5 Melting channels (7).

6 We've ten, to east and south (4).

7 Goes with soda, nc whisky (7).

8 Describes word bishop? (3, 3, 7).

9 Well-nourished bor dom (3, 2, 3, 5).

15 Art ain't all this (5

16 One of Macbeth murderees (5).

20 Saxophone's cousi (7).

21 and 28 Point fc pick-up (5, 2, 4).

22 Saline depression (4 3).

23 To leave can be ga (7).

27 Axe your choice (4

28 See 21.

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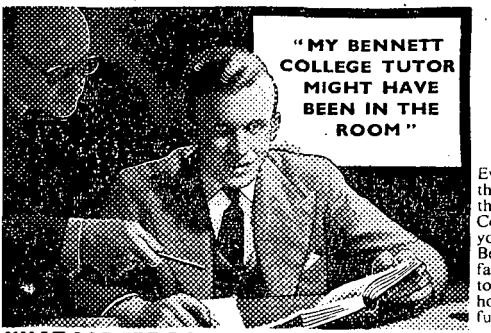

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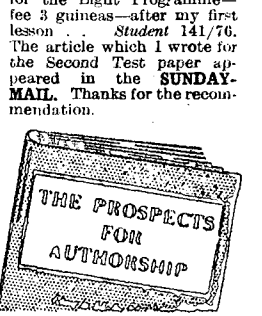
Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . . *Student* 778/2119 I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRY MAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested I submitted the article to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . Student 1954/15 I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**; they have since accepted another. I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156 The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 3 guineas—after my first lesson . . *Student* 141/76. The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY-MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.



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